The Melancholy of Schooling: A Critical Ethnographic Study of Race, Trauma, and Learning in a High School English Classroom

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACUTLY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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June 2017

Acknowledgements

There have been many people who have provided me with support, encouragement, inspiration, and guidance throughout the years that have enabled me to complete my doctorate.

I want to recognize and thank the following people for believing in me and my work: my advisors Tim Lensmire and Vichet Chhuon; my other committee members Nina Asher and J.B. Mayo; my wife Kelly, my sister Nicole, and my parents; and all of my friends and colleagues at the U of M and at Sumner High School.

Lastly, I want to thank the many scholars, past and present, who have inspired my work through their revolutionary thinking and writing.

Dedications

I dedicate this work to Mr. Turner and the brilliant students in the AVID/IB class.

Abstract

This year-long critical ethnographic study discusses the difficulties that arose when a multiracial class of 12th grade high school English students engaged in learning surrounding the reality of racism in the United States amid public displays of police brutality. Most notably, three high-profile cases of racial violence committed against black males, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice, took place within five months of each other and coincided with the school year that I conducted my fieldwork for this study.

Using the psychoanalytic concept of racial melancholia (Cheng, 2001) as a theoretical framework, I demonstrate how repressed forms of racial trauma and grief are experienced through the process of teaching and learning and how these processes are connected to larger formations of American racialization. My analyses focuses on the psycho-social (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008) construction, production, and transmission of trauma in the context of learning about race in the classroom. I place racial melancholia in conversation with theories of history (Benjamin, 1969), mourning (Freud, 1917), emotion (Ahmed, 2004), haunting (Frosh, 2013), whiteness (Thandeka, 1999) and affect (Massumi, 2015) to document the various ways that both the students and the classroom teacher struggled to learn and teach about racism. I argue that melancholic trauma and racial loss permeates American identities as a result of the nation's extensive history of denying its racial transgressions. The implications of the study emphasize that we must learn to identify and work through unresolved racial grief if we are to improve our comprehension of race and engender anti-racist agency in the face of persistent systemic and individual acts of racial subjugation. This dissertation makes a distinct contribution

to social justice approaches to education by underscoring the generative and productive possibilities for designing curriculum and employing critical pedagogies that center on understanding racial trauma.

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"Strange Fruit"

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Here is a strange and bitter crop

(Meeropol, 1937)

Introduction

The poem "Strange Fruit," written by Abel Meeropol in 1937 and then later recorded as a song by Billie Holiday in 1939, captures the haunting imagery of racial

violence in the United States. It acts as an extended metaphor, comparing the victims of Jim Crow-era lynching to fruit hanging from trees. The metaphor effectively illustrates the function of racial violence as crucial to the construction and subsequent growth of the U.S. as a globally dominant, imperialist, and racist nation-state. The imagery of blood-splattered roots and leaves, with a slight hint of burning flesh lingering after the sweet smell of flowers, is an expression of the naturalization of black death as tied to white vitality. The health of the white tree, its growth indicating its strength, bears the strange fruit of black bodies that serve to rot in the sun and become food for the crows once the fruit has perished. Blackness becomes the lifeblood for the tree; the more hanging fruit the tree produces, the more one might comment on its vitality. As the fruit continues to rot, scorched by the sun and blown by the wind, the tree loosens its grip on the fruit and it becomes one with the earth, destined to provide the seeds for new trees to sprout, which will produce new fruit to rot.

The song has had an enduring presence on the national consciousness; it has maintained a relevancy that corresponds with the steadfast presence of racial violence in America. The song has been remade numerous times, most notably in a rendition by Nina Simone in 1965, which became a popular protest anthem. More recently, hip-hop artist Kanye West sampled the song on his track "Blood on the Leaves," and British singer Rebecca Ferguson publicly declined to perform at President Donald Trump's inauguration, unless she were given permission to sing "Strange Fruit" (she was not). The song's fixture within popular culture suggests there is a persistent need to grieve losses resulting from the repetition of death, but there is also a form of haunting present in the melody—at once the song can be both cathartic and melancholic. The function of the

song in evoking seemingly divergent emotions related to liberation and sadness resembles black "sorrow songs" sung by slaves, which, according to Du Bois (1995), signified the intense connection between black suffering and a longing desire for black freedom. Cheng (2001) translates this dichotomous relationship to be a form of racial melancholia that "has always existed for raced subjects both as a *sign* of rejection and as a psychic *strategy* in response to that rejection" (p. 20, italics in original). The song is a symbolic embodiment of racial melancholia, simultaneously illustrating expressions of violence, trauma, grief, and hope within the context of a nation-state that is defined and structured by these very same racialized declarations.

"Strange Fruit" ultimately reminds us of the racial ghosts from our past that still haunt us in the present. However, if we were to re-write the song in order to characterize present-day racial violence in America, instead of black bodies being hung from trees we would sing of black bodies being shot or choked, perishing on a city street, an urban sidewalk, a neighborhood park. We would see bystanders, clutching cell phones with video cameras, recording the loss of black life and posting the evidence on social media for all the world to see. We would see the perpetrators of this violence, police officers who have sworn to "serve and protect," escape prosecution for their involvement in these murders. The central theme of the song stays the same—black death at the hands of white terrorism—but the lyrics shift slightly, from blood on the trees to blood on the concrete, from rotting fruit to wilting flowers.

Similar to the metaphorical illustration of American racialization that "Strange Fruit" provides, this dissertation explores how racial melancholia functioned in the lives of a group of 12th grade English students who were faced with making sense of past and

present forms of racism in their own lives and in American society. The classroom teacher, Mr. Turner, [1]a veteran white teacher at Sumner High School, was dedicated to educating students about the realities of racism in America. The modern version of "Strange Fruit" I imagined in the previous paragraph channeled three high-profile cases of racial violence and police brutality committed against black males—Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice. All took place within 5 months of each other and coincided with the 2014-2015 school year as I conducted my field work at Sumner High School[2]. Mr. Turner and the rest of the class of students were "haunted" by these murders as they struggled to understand racism inside and outside of the classroom. I emphasize the word "haunting" to indicate how we are forced to live with our losses. The murders of these black men demonstrate the overt violence of U.S. racialization and the methods through which this violence is wielded to maintain white supremacy. The history of this racial violence is what underscores the accumulation of death that continuously haunts the nation-state. As Marx (1934) once wrote, "The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living" (p. 595). The transmission of past racial violence and the emergence of racial violence in the present is illustrative of a racially melancholic nation struggling to exist with generations of ghosts. Through a theoretical and empirical examination of emotion, affect, trauma, and mourning, this dissertation places racial melancholia in conversation with teaching and learning in order to illuminate the ghosts that haunted Sumner High School.

[1] All teacher and student names are pseudonyms. Sumner High School and the communities surrounding the school are pseudonyms.
[2] I share more specific data related to school and class demographics in chapter 3.

This introductory chapter explains racial melancholia's connections to haunting by establishing its psycho-social [3]dimensions for theorizing loss, trauma, and grief. In part, I frame the study through my own haunting experiences as a teacher at Sumner High School, which ultimately led to my decision to conduct research in Mr. Turner's classroom. I highlight several moments during my teaching career at the school that shaped the composition of Mr. Turner's classroom and my own positionality as the researcher. These autobiographical reflections construct the historical context of my research and frame my ethnographic position within the setting. I end with a brief summary of each subsequent chapter of the dissertation.

The Melancholy of Schooling

I use the phrase "the melancholy of schooling[4]" to embody the ways in which racial violence, death, and loss shape the experience of schooling in multiracial classrooms. This characterization of schooling positions racial trauma as fundamental to defining education in the context of American racialization. The melancholy of schooling suggests that education is implicated in the construction, production, and transmission of racial trauma as a result of a nation defined by its racial transgressions. Racial trauma functions in schools through an expansive set of domains that I explore in this dissertation: structural, individual, social, affective, emotional, psychic, and unconscious. Each specific territory does not remain in isolation from the others; rather, racial trauma

[3] The hyphen in psycho-social studies signals a specific usage of "psycho," that indicates psychoanalysis. The "psycho" in psychosocial studies can represent different branches of psychology. However, following Clarke's (2006) usage of the hyphen between psycho-social, I will also use the hyphen to represent the merging of psychoanalysis and sociology.
[4] This phrase was inspired by Cheng's (2001) book entitled: *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*. The theory of racial melancholia outlined in this book had a tremendous influence on this dissertation.

pervades all of these areas, intersecting, overlapping, and interlocking in complex ways, traversing through every domain. Conceiving of racial trauma in such a multifaceted manner emphasizes the methods through which this trauma becomes an influential factor in teaching and learning about race in the classroom. Although racial suffering is a part of life outside of schools and classrooms, there is an added density to understanding trauma within a high school and in the lives of 12th grade students—that is, young adults are vulnerable and impressionable during this time in their lives. Britzman (2013) perceptively observes, "What gives the profession of education an added burden and its dramatic charge, however, is the afterwardness of the psychosocial fact that everyone has been to school throughout the most impressive, vulnerable, inexplicable, and dependent years of life" (p. 99). Adding to this point is the fact that the topic of race itself is fraught with the historical weight of centuries of pain, sadness, and grief attached to the formation of the U.S. nation-state.

Considering the difficulties youth face in school, during a time in life in which they are vulnerable, discussing the realities of racism only adds to the anxieties of both teachers and students who are often apprehensive about broaching such an uncomfortable topic. A recent article in *The Atlantic* indicated that although teachers felt it was important to have conversations about race in the classroom, they felt ill-prepared to have these discussions, and they typically avoided talking about racial violence altogether within classroom spaces (Anderson, 2017). The key idea to acknowledge when considering racism's attachments to education is that while teachers may avoid discussing race and racial violence on account of the subject's controversial or uncomfortable nature, racial trauma is still present regardless of whether or not

discussion occurs. If racial trauma exists within schools and classrooms no matter if race is discussed, how does it exist and how does it influence school and classroom life? How do we grieve our racial losses when these losses remain with us? What are the ways in which teaching and learning become attached to how we experience racial trauma inside and outside of school? The melancholy of schooling addresses these questions by theorizing racial melancholia's spectral presence in education.

Racial Melancholia and Hauntology

I define racial melancholia as a type of "hauntology" (Derrida, 1994), which defies any sort of temporal explanation. Racial melancholia's spectral presence refers to "what is no longer or not yet living, which is not something present or absent, but something that is possibly everywhere" (Zembylas, 2013, p. 79). Racial melancholia as a form of hauntology thus denotes a divorce from linear conceptions of time that draws attention to the ways we are always struggling to live with the ghosts around us. Or as Zembylas (2013) describes it, "time is always already spectral; in this sense, hauntology abolishes the concept of linear time as an ontological category of historical understanding" (p. 79). Zembylas (2013) believes that the concept of hauntology can be used as a pedagogical practice to make sense of the ghosts of those that have disappeared as a result of wars and dictatorships. Similarly, I argue that racial melancholia can be used as a powerful conceptual tool in education that exposes how the specters of our racial past—the remains of strange fruit sprouting from centuries of racial violence—continue to haunt us. In this instance, racial melancholia seeks to welcome and engage with ghosts rather than hide from them or expel them. Popular conceptions of haunting

position the apparitions that haunt us as originating from the past, but hauntology considers the ways in which the present and the future are also implicated in this relationship. As Derrida (1994) posits, specters are not contained within the past, present, or the future—they are timeless entities. The critical application of racial melancholia as a form of hauntology leaves open the possibilities for a different future. As Zembylas (2013) explains, "For Derrida, what is inherited from the past is that which constitutes the promise of the future" (p. 82). Engaging with racial melancholia in education provides a pedagogy that seeks to maintain hold of the past, keeping it alive in a dynamic fashion, in order to reclaim the potential to transform the future. This reclamation involves the notion that learning to understand, represent, and interact with racial ghosts can lead to new visions for racial justice.

Racial melancholia's haunting presence offers valuable insights for the study of race in education by uncovering how teaching and learning are plagued by the spectral remnants of the victims of racial violence. The impact of this form of racial haunting often has a nebulous existence because we cannot always clearly identify what is troubling us. Defining the spectral aspects of race involves the theorization of the intangible and invisible characteristics of racial trauma. But as Gordon (2008) explains, this is not a simple task: "In haunting, organized forces and systemic structures that appear removed from us make their impact felt in everyday life in a way that confounds our analytic separations and confounds the social separations themselves" (p. 19). Racial melancholia can help us comprehend how opaque forces, which often make their presence known in inexplicable ways, function to confuse how we share the same space with our racial ghosts. An analysis of haunting in the context of racialization must find

ways to make ghosts a *social* component of education. This interpretive process underscores how the spectral embodies the linkages between psychic and social spaces.

Racial melancholia signifies the "uncanny" (Freud, 1919) experience of haunting which defines the soul of American society. Cheng (2001) illustrates the racially melancholic condition of the U.S. nation-state as the struggle to see and live with its spirits: "*American culture gags on what it refuses to see*, for 'American culture' is confronted by ghosts it can neither emit or swallow" (p. 133, italics in original). This is a graphic depiction of the internalization and repression of haunting. Many of us would much rather pretend these ghosts do not exist, refusing to acknowledge their presence instead of dealing with their ubiquity. The uncanny experience of haunting animates the psycho-social formation of subjectivity. As Gordon (2008) explains, "the uncanny is the return, in psychoanalytic terms, of what the concept of the unconscious represses: the reality of being haunted by worldly contacts" (p. 55). Here we can begin to speak more explicitly concerning how the uncanny experience of haunting engages the unconscious. Racism—a *social* practice carried out through actions designed to subjugate non-whites (Fields & Fields, 2012)—encompasses practices of racial violence that engender racial trauma. The unconscious aspects of racialization show how material and political forms of racism enter into the realm of the psyche. Racial melancholia acts as a bridge connecting social acts of racism with psychic forms of trauma and vice versa.

Race, Psychoanalysis, and Psycho-social Studies

This dissertation uses psycho-social studies (Clarke, 2006) to explore how racial melancholia was an influential aspect of teaching and learning about race in Mr. Turner's

English classroom at Sumner High School. The usage of the psycho-social in conjunction with racial melancholia merges theories of psychoanalysis, sociology, and critical race studies to illustrate the complexities of racial trauma. In other words, psycho-social studies enables us to conceptualize the dynamic interplay between the internalization of racial trauma and the external sociohistorical presence of racism in American society. Frosh (2013) argues that although the word "psychic" conjures imagery related to mystical and occult elements, the experience of haunting is a very real phenomenon. For Frosh (2013), the achievement of psychoanalysis "is to show how dependent we are on our ghosts and phantasms to make ourselves alive" (p. 169). The task of psycho-social studies is to use psychoanalysis in such a way that we are able to comprehend how hauntings manifest consciously and unconsciously through our social relations. Psycho-social studies of racialization in the field of education suggest that the ghosts that haunt us are responsible for inducing racial traumas connected to the sociohistorical context of racism, and as a result, become influential in processes of teaching and learning. Because, as Gordon (2008) declares, "what lies between society and psyche is hardly an inert empty space" (p. 49).

Psychoanalysis has traditionally held a tenuous place in both critical scholarship on race and the field of education. In the case of psychoanalysis and race, the sordid history of racist aspects of psychoanalysis (Khanna, 2004) aside, the study of the psyche has not gained much traction in research on race, other than perhaps in the fields of literature and philosophy. Cheng (2001) believes that psychoanalysis has not been more widely used in race studies because of the idea that we have to theorize raced subjects as "real" victims of racism, since dominant justifications for racial discrimination have used

dehumanizing tactics. The fear is that if we make an analytic move toward studying the immaterial, inanimate, or the spectral, then we may suddenly lose sight of the material and quantifiable realities of racism. This is certainly a valid concern. In fact, my decision to frame this dissertation with theories of haunting may be seen by some as a form of academic risk-taking. Psychoanalysis and education have had a similarly fragile relationship. As Taubman (2012) notes, besides the relatively small field of curriculum theory, psychoanalysis has had no significant influence on the field of education. Taubman (2012) offers a few possibilities for this absence that include the shift to applied psychology and learning sciences as popular approaches to education, as well as the troubling reality for some that incorporating the unconscious into theories related to teaching may deviate from the neoliberal desires to maintain scripted curriculum with predetermined learning outcomes.

Rather than accept the assertion that psychoanalysis is inconsequential to theories related to race and education, this dissertation embraces the psycho-social characteristics of racialization in relation to schooling and uses it as a framework for transforming how we define trauma, loss, and grief in a white supremacist nation-state. Using psychoanalysis as a theoretical lens to study race and education calls for "a conversation about not why *we can* use psychoanalysis but why *we already do*" (Cheng, 2001, p. 28, italics in original). Even if we do not recognize the importance of the psyche, it does not mean that the unconscious is not already at work, functioning as the transmitter of our internalized thoughts, wishes, and desires. Repudiating a psychoanalytic framework for understanding racism amounts to a denial of the racial ghosts that haunt society as we "gag" on what we refuse to acknowledge or comprehend. It is this refusal to learn to live

with loss that impacts psycho-social life and muddles our understanding of racial grief. I argue that to properly theorize racial trauma in education, the unconscious cannot be ignored, but neither can the social. Thus, a psycho-social account of racialization seeks to engage with both the internal and the external. Psychoanalysis is a crucial element in this equation. In the introduction to the edited volume of *The Psychoanalysis of Race*, Lane (1998) contends that without the study of the unconscious, cultural meanings of race cannot be properly understood. In the book *Disavowed Knowledge: Psychoanalysis, Education, and Teaching*, Taubman (2012) presents a compelling argument that without a comprehension of psychoanalytic ideas in education, we are missing a major piece of the puzzle when attempting to theorize teaching and learning in the quest for emancipatory forms of education. As such, this dissertation argues that we cannot explain teaching and learning about race in the classroom *without* a psycho-social interpretation of racial trauma.

My usage of racial melancholia is integral to the deployment of a psycho-social theorization of race and education. The concept encompasses the broad analytical underpinnings of psychoanalysis and social forms of racial discrimination. Melancholia's psychoanalytic roots (Freud, 1917) have enabled race scholars to develop theories of racialization that incorporate how grief, trauma, and loss structure the subjectivities of racial minorities (Cheng, 2001; Eng, 2000; Eng & Han, 2000). It is significant to note that scholars have also used melancholia outside the realm of race to critique a variety of different understandings of oppression and the traumatic experiences that occur as a result of this oppression. These concepts include postcolonial melancholia (Gilroy, 2005; Khanna, 2004), gender melancholia (Butler, 1995), and melancholia and queer politics

(Crimp, 2002). Although I highlight these important variations, I use racial melancholia in a distinct way to elucidate the connections among schooling, racial violence, and loss. My theory of racial melancholia also deviates from race scholars who have used the concept most prominently to deconstruct Asian American identity (Eng, 2000; Eng & Han, 2000). I engage the powerful associations between white violence committed against black bodies as the origination of a distinct form of racial melancholia haunting Mr. Turner's classroom. I focus primarily on this relationship between whiteness and blackness as a method for symbolizing the core of racial trauma as a history of black death at the hands of white supremacy. Frosh (2013) states, "If we are afflicted by a trauma, the difficulty we have is the failure to symbolize, the impossibility of articulating what it is we are troubled by" (p. 19). The heart of racial melancholia's presence in Mr. Turner's classroom found both him and his students afflicted by traumas while learning about the history of racial violence committed against black bodies and the present reality of public displays of police officers murdering black men in the streets. This dissertation attempts to symbolize and analyze these traumatic experiences as a method for engendering new pathways for working through racial trauma in school and classroom spaces.

The Critical Ethnographer as Cultural Insider: Autobiographical Reflections

My first teaching job after college was at Sumner High School, and I have been employed at the school ever since. As a researcher conducting ethnographic work, I had quite an extensive history within the research setting. I had been an English teacher at the same school for nine years prior to conducting my year-long study in Mr. Turner's

English classroom. Not only was I familiar with the school, but I also had deep connections with both Mr. Turner and the students in the classroom. These relationships had been established through my position as the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) coordinator position I held at the school. Mr. Turner's English classroom was a product of the merging of two programs at Sumner, AVID and the school's International Baccalaureate program (IB). The 12th grade students in what I will from now on refer to as the "AVID/IB" class, were members of the AVID program when I was their English teacher in 9th and 10th grade. Additionally, Mr. Turner was chosen to teach the class based on his passion for social justice. In part, this passion was developed through our friendship as colleagues at Sumner. Through my work in coordinating the AVID program and creating partnerships with IB, I participated in the design and implementation of the AVID/IB curriculum that Mr. Turner taught the class.

With so much rich history with the school, classroom, and participants, my researcher positionality is that of a cultural insider. In this section, I reflect on crucial events that occurred during my time as a teacher at Sumner, which contributed to my desires to do critical ethnographic work at the site. In order to provide historical context for the chapters that follow, I trace salient moments through my own autobiographical reflections. First, I share a story concerning my first day as a teacher at Sumner and analyze how it became a form of racial haunting. I then detail critical events, originating from this haunting experience, from my nine years teaching at the school that led to the formation of the AVID/IB classroom.

Hauntings at Sumner: My First Day of Teaching

I was haunted by the specter of race from the moment I stepped foot into Sumner High School. Arriving at school during "Workshop Week" on that first day, I was somewhat relieved I would have a full week of preparation before students started school. It made me a little less nervous to start my career as a teacher. What I was most worried about during that first day was how my fellow colleagues would perceive me. Sumner was a large high school consisting of a student body that numbered over 3,000 and a teaching staff of around 100. I was aware that the overwhelming majority of teachers at the school were white. Identifying as a black male educator, I was not sure what to expect when I met my new colleagues. Because of this nervousness, on my drive into school that first day I got lost, and as a result I was almost an hour late. As I walked into Sumner, I was directed to go into the gymnasium where I stumbled upon the entire staff sitting on the bleachers as the principal discussed the impending school year. The only option I had was to walk in plain view of all the staff and find a spot to sit in the robust crowd. After sitting down in the stands, in addition to feeling very embarrassed I felt that everyone was judging me for being black because I was late, confirming the stereotype that black people are never on time. The events that occurred during the rest of the day lingered in my consciousness for many years and haunted me long after that first week. This lingering feeling of distress was apparent from my writing on the incident. I share an excerpt from a chapter I wrote in the book *White Teachers/Diverse Classrooms*, where I describe what transpired after exiting the gymnasium as the staff participated in a "diversity gallery walk:"

> *As the staff strolled out of the gymnasium a couple of my Language Arts colleagues rushed up to me to introduce themselves. I felt a little relieved seeing*

their smiling, friendly faces. I proceeded to walk around the school and look at the displays students had created. Many staff members greeted me very warmly as we walked, talked, and took in all the beautiful student work. Most of our conversations consisted of: Hi, how are you doing? I am so and so. I teach this subject. I have worked here this long. Are you new? What do you teach? I was very pleased at how friendly and welcoming the staff was.

I had several conversations with teachers and other staff members and I began to notice a pattern in some of the conversations. I and another staff member would be engaged in discussion and inevitably the question of what I teach or what my job is here would come up. I would answer accordingly: "I am a new English teacher here." However, several staff members, instead of asking me what my job was, simply stated, "You must be one of the new security guards here. Nice to meet you." The first time this happened I simply corrected them and chalked it up to being an honest mistake. But the next three times it happened, it really started to bother me. These staff members perceived me to be a security guard instead of a teacher. Once again, felt like people were judging me because I was black. At the end of the day, I thought to myself, "Oh boy, this is going to be a long year."

(Grinage, 2011, p. 124-125)

This narrative explains the origins of the haunting presence of race that was an immediate part of my life at Sumner High School.

The original purpose of the narrative was to show how white teachers have unconscious racial biases and how negative stereotypes affect students of color in

debilitating ways. However, in retrospect, I realize I was experiencing a severe type of melancholia that engaged both race and the psyche. Exploring my own subjectivity related to this incident and how it shaped my positionality helps to frame my psychoanalytic and affective investments within Sumner, first as a teacher and then later as a researcher. Taubman (2012) emphasizes the importance of investigating one's psychic attachments to their work because often those that write about psychoanalysis and education ignore the autobiographical characteristics of their scholarship. I have strong psychic and affective connections that developed from my lengthy history as an employee within the school as well as from the incident I described.

The reality that several white teachers at Sumner assumed I was a security guard instead of a new teacher had a tremendous influence on my first year of teaching. The haunting experience of those racial assumptions caused me to question my teaching abilities because I frequently felt as though I were unwelcome at the school. My self-confidence became fragile, which made the already stressful experience of being a first-year teacher even more traumatic. In an attempt to compensate for feeling unwelcome and unqualified, I overworked myself to the point of exhaustion. I stayed at work long after my colleagues went home for the day, attempting to craft perfect lessons and units, grading papers, and making phone calls to students' families. The joke repeated frequently from my English colleagues was that I actually never went home. In fact, at an end-of-year celebration, they gave me a pillow that they all signed so I could be comfortable when I spent the night at work.

The incident, although seemingly subtle, amplified my sense of awareness regarding my blackness in majority white spaces. Being mistaken for a security guard

awakened something inside of me that I had previously repressed. The "uncanny" haunting I encountered at Sumner was my conscious socialization of racial ghosts. It was the catalyst for a stimulation of a "double consciousness" (Du Bois, 1995) in which I developed a split identity, at once internalizing my paranoia over not "measuring up" to the imagined standards of white expectations and becoming overwhelmed by my sensitivity to how my white colleagues perceived my blackness. The specter of race became a daunting aspect of my first year of teaching where I felt an enhanced form of stereotype threat (Steele, 2010) which caused me to be vulnerable, cautious about confirming negative stereotypes of my blackness. My psychic struggle with race was concurrently being waged with overtly racial incidents occurring simultaneously. For example, a black female student, who was always complaining about how her Industrial Technology teacher was racist, asked me to write her a late pass to his class after I finished helping her with an assignment. She was nervous about how the teacher would react to this pass because she felt like he was always targeting her for being black and as a result she believed he would think she forged the pass. I told her that if he questioned the validity of her pass to have him call me and confirm that I wrote the pass for her. After several minutes, he did call me, but instead of confirming the pass, he proceeded to chastise me for writing a late pass "for a student like her."

A type of "racial battle fatigue" (Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007) set in because of my psycho-social struggles with race at Sumner. For the first time in my life, I was recognizing schooling as a racially turbulent environment for people of color. This realization elicited a persistent and intense feeling of sadness and frustration. Reflecting on how I felt then, I now identify this internal struggle as a prolonged experience of racial

melancholia. I began to view my own high school education as fraudulent because I started to understand that I was conditioned to deny the existence of racism's impact on schooling. The model of education I received resembles Greene's (1976) concept of "mystification" that normalizes the methods of social control reproduced by educational institutions. I had failed to receive a "critical" view of the world; instead, I learned to conform to a simplistic type of learning that mystified the complexities of racialization. I learned to navigate an educational system that rewarded me for adhering to the maintenance of the status quo and to disregard and repress evidence contradicting educational spaces' reputation as fair and honest. My first year at Sumner was indeed a shock to my system as the repetitious psycho-social battle with race left me fatigued to the point where I was strongly considering leaving the profession altogether. However, engaging with racial ghosts also created a burning desire within me to understand the function of race in education. This strong desire arose through the insight that my students needed me to advocate, protect, and empower them. For the first time, I began to grasp the power of education as a vehicle for social justice and social transformation.

I was able to survive my first year of teaching in spite of the haunting presence of racism at Sumner. During my next few years of teaching, I sought to satisfy my desire to comprehend the operation of racism within the field of education. I began to read scholarship written in this area and joined a professional development cohort focused on understanding racial impacts on student achievement within the school district. I also began developing an equity-focused curriculum centered on demystifying dominant narratives surrounding racism and other forms of oppression. I became dedicated to learning how to interact with the racial ghosts I had been ignoring all my life. A fellow

colleague informed me about a Ph.D. program at the University of Minnesota that would enable me to study race and education. My hunger for more knowledge and my passion for social justice led me to eventually take on this challenge and I enrolled in the program. Conducting critical ethnography at Sumner was an extension of my eagerness to further analyze how race haunts the lives of students in the school. My affective history at Sumner allowed for a kind of intimacy with these ghosts, originating from my struggles with racism at the beginning of my teaching career in the very same space I chose for this study.

The Creation of the AVID/IB Classroom: An Abbreviated History

In some ways you have been working on this ethnography for four years.

Mr. Turner

Sometime during my fieldwork inside Mr. Turner's AVID/IB classroom, we started a conversation about how a current student in the class had progressed since 9th grade. Since I had known the student for their entire high school career, I was able to talk knowledgably about how this individual, when she was a student in my 9th grade AVID class, struggled to engage and participate in class activities. As I compared what I remembered of her in 9th grade to her increased rate of participation in 12th grade, I was able to convey to Mr. Turner how much this student had grown intellectually and socially over her time in high school. With a sudden bright smile Mr. Turner said:

> "That's so great that you got to see her progress. I kind of wish I could've known her for that long because she is so fun to have in class. You know, in some ways you have been working on this ethnography for four years." (Fieldnotes, 4/24/15)

I was struck by what Mr. Turner stated about this ethnography. Although my fieldwork encompassed one year in the lives of these students, I had so much prior knowledge about the research setting and participants, and I felt his statement was an eloquent way of contextualizing my positionality in this study. After our conversation, I began to think more intensely about his declaration and realized that my roots at Sumner ran much deeper than four years. Not only did I have previous relationships with both Mr. Turner and the AVID/IB students, but I also contributed to the development of the curriculum for the class over my seven years as coordinator of Sumner's AVID program. Although I comment more specifically on my unique researcher positionality and the specificities of both the AVID and IB programs in chapter 3, here, I briefly detail crucial events that occurred during my teaching career at Sumner that contributed to the formation of the AVID/IB classroom, where I conducted my ethnographic research, in order to provide historical context for the study.

Founding the AVID program at Sumner

After my first year teaching at Sumner I began to explore more ways to get involved within the school. In addition to joining the district's equity initiative, I also began coaching 9th grade girls' basketball. I wanted to immerse myself in the culture of the school to find ways to make connections with as many students as possible and learn how to best support them. Being one of the only teachers of color at the school, I also wanted to be a mentor for students of color who often did not have a teacher that looked like them. Toward the end of my second year of teaching, the building administration approached me with an opportunity to be the coordinator for a new district program

called AVID. After hearing about the objectives of the program—close the achievement gap, help underserved students (first-generation college students, low-income students, and students of color), and foster lasting relationships—I enthusiastically agreed. The next year the program started with a cohort of 32 9th grade students who would be together in the same AVID class for four years. We combined what is called the "AVID Elective Course" and honors-level English into the same class (the official class title being "AVID/Honors English 9") because we wanted to provide access to rigorous coursework in order to prepare students for post-secondary opportunities. In addition to coordinating the program, I was also tasked with the teaching of the AVID/Honors English nine and ten courses.

Although there was a suggested curriculum for the new course, I was given the flexibility to create a curriculum that best suited the overall interests of the class. This was an advantageous position to be in considering my budding interest in developing social justice-oriented curriculum. The AVID coordinator position gave me the freedom to subvert the district-mandated curriculum that often did not employ texts, concepts, and standards that used equity as the central focus. Typically, I would be reprimanded for not following these mandates, but since the class was new, there were no prior restrictions on coursework. This freedom allowed for the creation of a program where social justice was the central focus of the course. Together, the class sought to examine how power functions in society, learn how to think more critically about the world, and define the meaning of justice and activism. Many of the students in this first cohort were drawn to this type of learning since they felt as though school had not been a space for opportunity and advancement for them. With this new curriculum, they were beginning to understand

how to navigate the school system while also recognizing the discriminatory constraints imposed on them by society. In short, they were becoming empowered.

The inaugural AVID cohort had a strong bond and strived to make the program successful for future members. Toward the end of the cohort's 10th grade year, I was unsure as to the direction of the course in 11th and 12th grade. The only advanced option for English coursework was IB English, as "honors" English no longer existed after 10th grade. Traditionally, the IB program at Sumner was a space occupied by a majority white, affluent student population, whereas the first AVID cohort was composed of low-income students of color and low-income white students. The AVID students insisted on taking IB English 11 and 12—the two most rigorous English courses in the school. When I approached administration about this idea, they denied the request, expressing skepticism regarding the cohort's preparedness for taking IB courses. Essentially, administration did not believe the group would be successful. When students discovered they were being denied access to these rigorous courses, they were outraged. Some students, without my permission, angrily marched to the principal's office and demanded an explanation; other students had their parents call the school to complain; others wrote letters to administration. After some deliberation, spurred by these protests, the students were granted access to IB English in 11th and 12th grade.

Critical Friendship: Mr. Turner's Passion for Social Justice

During the first AVID cohort's 10th grade year, Mr. Turner began teaching English at Sumner High School. Mr. Turner was white, tall, and thin. He wore flannel shirts almost every day and kept a well-groomed beard. My first impressions of him, I

must admit, was that he embodied the stereotype of a privileged, white teacher who would only connect with the privileged, white students. However, after getting to know Mr. Turner, I realized that this was far from the truth. Mr. Turner's energetic and friendly personality exhibited a genuine care for all students. We started having frequent conversations about race and equity-related issues occurring within the school. He seemed to have an open mind concerning these issues and was eager to learn more.

The nature of our work relationship changed after a conversation we had about finishing our Master's degrees. We both had one more course to take before we completed our degrees, and Mr. Turner mentioned that he was taking a class centered on "learning technologies," which was being offered online. I told him that I was taking a course a colleague recommended to me which focused on race and education. Mr. Turner said it sounded interesting, but that he was sharing a car with his wife so he would not have transportation to attend the class. I offered to drive him to class and take him home after, and we agreed to take the class together.

The experience of taking the class together, and the critical discussions Mr. Turner and I engaged in on the drive to and from class, transformed our relationship. The class, titled "The Politics of Race in K-12 Schools," was a mixture of accomplished Ph.D. students, practicing classroom teachers, and undergraduate students. Dr. Lensmire, the professor, challenged us to think deeply about how race was influential in our own lives and in the lives of our students. The two most transformative aspects of the class for us were reading the text *Learning to be White: Money, Race, and God in America* (Thandeka, 1999) and conducting a group project analysis of race in Dave Chappelle's comedy. These experiences opened a space for Mr. Turner and me to examine both

whiteness and race in popular culture within the context of our budding friendship. We then began to extend these conversations to examine our own curriculum and pedagogy. Over time our friendship blossomed, and we grew to a place where we could genuinely trust one another.

Before the first AVID cohort reached 12th grade, we needed to identify an English teacher to teach the AVID/IB 12 course. Taking into account the AVID program's social justice focus, we wanted a teacher with a strong desire and ability to build an equity-centered course. Several English teachers at Sumner interviewed for the position, but Mr. Turner showed that his dedication to social justice went above and beyond our expectations. He was selected to teach the AVID/IB 12 class. He believed that his passion was generated, in part, by taking Dr. Lensmire's class and the numerous conversations he and I had had about race.

Merging AVID and IB: Curriculum Implementation

When the first AVID cohort reached 11th grade and enrolled in AVID/IB English, they struggled immensely with the curriculum. The coursework consisted of reading and analyzing a series of texts that did not interest the students in the class. Many students could not relate to the themes in most of the books that they were required to read. Mr. Turner noted: "The curriculum back then I don't think would have even interested me, let alone our [AVID] students. It was just books written by dead white men" (Interview, 6/9/15). Despite the students' disinterest in the curriculum for the class, they persevered and advanced to enroll in AVID/IB English 12 for their senior year. Their 11th grade teacher Ms. Palmieri (another teacher passionate about social justice), Mr. Turner, and I

recognized that to ensure the success of future AVID cohorts we would need to change the curriculum for both of these courses since, unfortunately, the 12th grade IB English coursework was not much different than that of 11th grade IB.

That summer we were provided an opportunity to attend IB training in New Mexico. Mr. Turner, Ms. Palmieri, and I used this trip to revamp the entire IB English curriculum. We curated texts that we believed fit the interests of our racially diverse program. We sought to develop a type of critical literacy where students could examine inequalities and read texts that reflected the social and psychological impacts of complex formations of oppression as a method for "reading the word and the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987). In the 12th grade IB class, these core texts included *A Street Car Named Desire* (Williams, 1947), *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2000), and most importantly for the purposes of this study, *Native Son* (Wright, 1940) (I comment on the significance of reading *Native Son* and how it influenced learning about race in chapters 3 and 7). The combination of the adoption of this curriculum, the passion of teachers like Mr. Turner, and the trailblazing efforts of the first AVID cohort paved the way for the success of the AVID program at Sumner High School.

This study examines the AVID/IB class during the 2014–2015 school year. These students entered Mr. Turner's classroom in the seventh year of AVID's existence at Sumner. They walked into a space with a teacher who valued social justice and desired to discuss critical issues impacting both them and society. They encountered a curriculum that was developed to investigate oppression for the purposes of empowerment and activism. They entered the final phase of a program that pursued social justice through emancipatory teaching and learning. This dissertation explains what happened when both

Mr. Turner and students in the AVID/IB class struggled with their own racial ghosts at Sumner High School.

Overview of Chapters

In the following chapters I elucidate how race informed and shaped the experiences of students in the AVID/IB classroom. This ethnography demonstrates the powerful influence of racial melancholia on teaching and learning as the enduring presence of racism in the U.S. continues to define what it means to be "American." Schools and classrooms do not take place in a vacuum; therefore constructions of American racialization, including the pervasive existence of racial violence, become fundamental to understanding the intersections of race and education. As stated in this introductory chapter, I argue that the use of racial melancholia as a psycho-social framework for comprehending how racism continues to haunt our subjectivities is crucial to interpreting the complexities of racial trauma. The rest of the chapters expand on the concept of racial melancholia through an exploration of its psycho-social connections to Sumner High School and the AVID/IB classroom.

I begin broadly with my explanation of racial melancholia in Chapter 2. This chapter thoroughly illustrates my theory of racial melancholia by analyzing the historical, psychoanalytic, and social aspects of the concept. I explore the links between racial melancholia and U.S. racial violence in order to demonstrate how these attachments frame larger sociohistorical formations of race in America. This chapter includes descriptions of the psycho-social dimensions of racialization as well as an explanation of how the corporeal aspects of race structure racial trauma. I then trace how racial

melancholia's psycho-social origins frame school and classroom spaces by explaining racial melancholia's associations with emotion and affect. I show how melancholia, emotion, and affect are tied to learning about race within classroom spaces.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology, methods, and data analysis I used for this critical ethnographic study. This chapter is broken down into three sections. The first section specifies how critical ethnography serves as a multidimensional methodology for the study of race in education. I explain how critical ethnography blends with race theory and psycho-social studies to form an innovative approach to research that pushes the boundaries of criticality. I then more specifically explicate the research setting and participants with a discussion of the key aspects of Sumner High School and the AVID/IB classroom, including racial demographics and a contextual breakdown of the research setting. The next section showcases the specific methods I used for the study. Here, I give explanations for how I conducted my fieldwork and collected data. In the last section of this chapter I write about psycho-social studies as a technique for data analysis. I highlight how the study of psychoanalysis, emotion, and race in the classroom can be enhanced by psycho-social studies. I comment on how the external, social, intersubjective world interacts with the internal, psychic, and intrasubjective realm and vice versa.

In chapters 4, 5, and 6, I focus more specifically on how racial melancholia became an endemic fixture for students both inside and outside of the AVID/IB classroom. These chapters illuminate the interdisciplinary nature of this study as I place racial melancholia in conversation with theories related to emotion, affect, history, whiteness, mourning, and trauma to elucidate the various struggles that occurred when the class encountered the insidiousness of racism.

Chapter 4 critiques a classroom encounter between a black student, Richard, and a white student, Nick, that disrupted Mr. Turner's attempt to facilitate a discussion about racial progress in America. The incident involved students positioning themselves on a continuum between 1 and 10—1 representing no racial progress since the 1930s and 10 representing full racial equity. When Richard positioned himself at the low end of the continuum and Nick located himself on the high end, a conflict ensued and Mr. Turner had to make a split-second decision as to how he was going to handle it. During this decision, racial melancholia mediated the affective environment and influenced the emotional responses of the teacher and students in the classroom. I argue that the affective register of the classroom was altered by racial melancholia which produced intensified emotional responses that I call "melancholic affects."

In chapter 5, I develop a theory of white racial melancholia that highlights the difficulties that white students faced when attempting to learn about race inside and outside of the AVID/IB classroom. I argue that the core of white identity is the melancholic conflict between the desire to reach out beyond the white community and the fear that emerges when these desires arise. This was a distinct form of racial melancholia that crystallized in childhood and subsequently prevented white students in the class from confronting the reality of racism in America. I illustrate how white students endured a psycho-social indoctrination into whiteness through childhood trauma which gave rise to neurotic behaviors when met with the truth surrounding the oppressiveness of whiteness. I contend that in order to engender white anti-racism, students must recognize and work through the white racial melancholia that shapes their identities.

Chapter 6 analyzes the differences between mourning and melancholia in the context of black grief. I highlight how disarticulated grief and ambiguous loss contribute to an inability to mourn racial losses for black youth in education. Following this analysis, I illustrate instances where black students worked to engender pathways for agency in spite of their racial wounds. I suggest that in order to work through racial trauma there need to be processes of both mourning and melancholia that illustrate the non-pathological, generative capabilities of racial melancholia. Using examples of individual and collective attempts at mourning within school and classroom spaces, I underscore how racial melancholia framed racial trauma for black students at Sumner High School. I then introduce the possibilities for a type of collective mourning that can be practiced within classrooms where racial grief can be identified, symbolized, and addressed.

In conclusion, chapter 7 positions the combination of Mr. Turner's pedagogy and the class' reading of *Native Son* (1940) as significantly influential in developing racial literacy and exposing the often-hidden realities of racial violence in America. I first examine Mr. Turner's psycho-social struggles facilitating emotionally tumultuous critical race dialogues in the classroom. I then interpret *Native Son* (1940) as a racially melancholic novel that uncovers historical modes of racial violence in American society. I provide this pedagogical and curricular analysis as a call to action for educators and researchers to embrace traumatic learning in pursuit of social justice. To this end, I make suggestions for future research in racial melancholia studies in education. And lastly, I discuss the relationship between raising critical consciousness and taking anti-racist actions in the AVID/IB classroom.

Chapter 2

Racial Melancholia and Education: Trauma, Emotion, and Affect

Avowals of and attachments to loss can produce a world of remains as a world of new representations and alternate meanings. (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003, p. 5)

Introduction

August 9, 2014, a hot summer day in Ferguson, Missouri, unexpectedly engrossed my attention. I have always known that the threat of violence, destruction, and death could be waiting just around the corner, that my blackness marked my body as subhuman, wicked, and bestial. A horrible feeling of unsettling and unpredictable fear that my life may be snatched away at any moment has clouded my consciousness for as long as I can remember. My attempts at dealing with these horrible feelings involved a process of avoidance and repression. I would avoid spaces where I perceived I may be judged by the color of my skin. In these situations racial diversity was my support. I felt a great amount of comfort in seeing other black or brown faces in a crowd of whiteness. I began to avoid interacting with people I thought may let slip a racial joke or say something racially insensitive. I tried as best as I could to repress feeling terror as I witnessed another police shooting of an unarmed black "suspect" on the evening news. After the murder of Trayvon Martin, I went through a complex mental exercise of coping with my emotions by systematically eluding my own sense of dread. I would keep my mind occupied through reading, exercising, watching movies—whatever it took to keep from thinking about death. Eventually, as time passed, I was able to overcome these

feelings related to his death, pushing them into my unconscious in order to gain a sense of equilibrium, to feel stable again.

I became well-versed at blocking my feelings and escaping perceived racial threats. Sure, I was often overly paranoid and antisocial, but I justified it, thinking these were the necessary drawbacks of living in a society where my body is disposable. Then I turned on the news on that August day and saw Michael Brown's limp, lifeless body sprawled on the scorching hot concrete, his body laid out for the world to see for over four hours. The emotions I felt after seeing his young, black body annihilated is not something easily captured by language. There was nothing I could do to dodge these feelings much less describe them. The impact of Michael Brown laying out in the sun shattered my ability to ward off or hide my emotions. It was traumatic and painful; I felt panic. I did not want to leave the comfort of my home, suddenly lamenting my decision to purchase a house so close to the local police station. I'm not sure why Michael Brown's death hit me so hard considering less than a month before, police officers were recorded choking the life out of Eric Garner on a public New York street corner in broad daylight. Maybe it was not so much the public display of black destruction at the hands of white supremacy but the blatant disregard for the aftermath of this destruction. Whiteness had once again exposed how meaningless and insignificant black life can be and left the bodily remnants of this life to rot in the street, as if to taunt us and remind us of our seemingly hopeless reality.

A few months after Michael Brown's death I was still haunted by the image of his body abandoned in the street. Moreover, other police shootings of unarmed black victims continued to flood national media outlets, including high-profile cases such as Tamir

Rice and Walter Scott. There were also lesser-known cases of state violence that largely stayed hidden from the media news cycle that included violence against indigenous people, black women, and transgender people of color. These cases coincided with the 2014-2015 school year where I conducted a critical ethnographic research study at Sumner High School. Here is where I interviewed James, a 12th grade student who identifies as black and Laotian—his father being African-American and his mother being from Laos. His skin is a golden brown color, almost matching mine. He is a young man very much concerned about the recent police violence exerted against men who look just like him. James expressed how he handles dealing with race in his day-to-day life:

> I think that definitely my guard goes up and that is because you get scared because of the things that happened over the past few months, things that happen every day. You get scared and your guard has to go up otherwise you are going to be an easy victim. So I think just staying aware, being aware of your surroundings and what could possibly happen is your best option. (Interview, 2/13/15)

James' response is indicative of the common presence of paranoia and anxiety that many feel in a country where your body can be taken away from you, without warning and without question. James' experience with racism is not unlike my own: The threat of violence is always present in a nation where one's racial affiliations define their humanity.

Michael Brown's death, along with the deaths of so many others like him, symbolizes the links between the United States' history of racial violence and how this violence continues to shape the country's present system of racialization. Understanding how we are subjected to racism must include a theorization of how the U.S. enacts

violence against communities of color to re-enforce racial hierarchies while simultaneously justifying this force through racial ideologies that seek to erase past racial wrongdoings in favor of U.S. exceptionalism. As Hong and Ferguson (2011) asserts, "What it means to be racialized is to experience the state as not the institution that guarantees the universal protection of life but one that is the very agent of death" (p. 254). It is critical to establish that the U.S. is not only an "agent of death" but exists only because of these deaths. The origins of the U.S. nation-state and its subsequent rise to power as a capitalist juggernaut can be traced back to histories of racial violence. Rooted in coloniality, U.S. racialization "emerges from a history of criminality, including kidnapping, false imprisonment, forced labor, murder, contempt of personhood, assault, torture, and theft of land" (Martinot, 2010, p. 20). Michael Brown and countless[5] other victims of police brutality are representative of how white supremacy functions to oppress. This violent aspect of racialization cannot be overstated, as it is fundamental to the operation of contemporary racism and runs counter to the ideological pattern of denying the nation's violent racial past in order to ensure a racist future.

A nation built on death must necessarily encounter loss. Indeed, much of how we experience racism as a country is a function of our relationship with loss. In particular, I am referring to America's betrayal of its own democratic ideals: a repressed history of racial violence buried underneath a narrative of liberty, justice, and equality. Racialization occurs through our entangled history of racial violence and the resulting loss that stems from this violence. Racial identities are secured through the ideological

[5] I mean "countless" quite literally. A 2015 Washington Post article found a gross lack of accurate FBI data concerning police shootings in the U.S. The article suggests that because of inaccurate data, the FBI cannot determine if high-profile police shootings are isolated incidents or a part of a wider trend (Davis & Lowery, 2015).

instillation of the revered American mantra "all men are created equal" in the midst of rampant racism that proves otherwise. Coates (2015) writes:

> Racism is rendered as the innocent daughter of Mother Nature, and one is left to deplore the Middle Passage or the Trail of Tears the way one deplores an earthquake, a tornado, or any other phenomenon that can be cast as beyond the handiwork of men (p. 7)

This naturalization of human loss constitutes an American racial identity: a convoluted historical memory instituted as a result of repeatedly covering up racial atrocities. How can we grieve these losses when we cannot properly articulate our attachments to this grief? Herein lies the core of my unsettling trauma surrounding the death of Michael Brown. James' frightened behavior and my emotional turmoil are not disconnected from the destruction of Michael Brown's body, just as they are not detached from the brutalization of Emmett Till, just as they are not separate from the victims of Jim Crow lynching. Violent destruction of blackness is a type of trauma that is generational, passed down from a shared recognition that the black body is always in danger.

A deeper engagement with racial loss and our physical and emotional attachments to these losses must disentangle the elaborate denial of our national history of violence. This engagement involves an exploration of the psychic and social realities of racial trauma and the effects of racial injury on our conscious and unconscious mental processes. The naming of what was lost has a dialectical relationship with what remains. The concept of *melancholia* (Freud, 1917) can be used as a theoretical link between the United States' history of racial loss and an analysis of the ways in which this often-

hidden pain frames how we experience racism in the present. Eng and Kazanjian (2003) explain the extensive interpretive capabilities of melancholia:

> As both a formal relation and a structure of *feeling*, a mechanism of disavowal and a constellation of *affect*, melancholia offers a capaciousness of meaning in relation to losses encompassing the individual and the collective, the spiritual and the material, the *psychic and the social*, and the aesthetic and the political. (p. 3, italics added)

In this chapter, I use melancholia as a conceptual framework to represent how historical modes of racial violence structure contemporary racialization. I provide a specific elucidation of how melancholia helps to frame our emotions, which influence the ways we are subjected to racism through affective racial encounters. Emotional and affective modes of interaction reveal the complexities of the ways that racial grief generated from histories of loss shape how we relate psycho-socially as racialized subjects. A melancholic analysis of history, trauma, and grief goes some way toward illustrating the generational transmission of loss that constitutes our racial subjectivities. Melancholia serves as a mechanism for understanding the origin of our complicated feelings about race.

I mention my interview with James to underscore how history, trauma, and grief have direct consequences for the study of race in education. When James walks through the front doors to enter Sumner High School and then walks down the hallway to attend his classes, the fear he feels from the racial violence occurring around him does not leave him. He carries this psychic baggage wherever he goes. By theorizing melancholia's influence on race, emotion, and affect, I create a conceptual framework to assist in

comprehending how James and his 12th grade classmates deal with this racial baggage as they confront the difficulties that come with learning about race with one another. As Cheng (2001) proclaims, "The history of disarticulated grief is still speaking through the living, and the future of social transformation depends on how open we are to facing the intricacies and paradoxes of that grief and the passions that it bequeaths" (p. 29). Following her plea for revolution, I suggest that we extend the usage of melancholia to uncover the ways grief and trauma enter into classroom space and invade the psycho-social dynamics of classroom life. Through this engagement with racial injury, we can formulate theories for teaching and learning about racism that will help both teachers and students work through their racial trauma.

Racial Melancholia and U.S. History

Melancholia and Racial Identity

Scholars have used melancholia to better understand racialization in the context of psychoanalysis, identity, assimilation, and trauma (see Cheng 1997; 2001; Eng, 2000; Eng & Han, 2000). In particular, Cheng, in her book *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*, outlines a theory of melancholia that draws attention to the hypocritical positioning of America as having achieved democratic ideals in spite of past racial transgressions that disprove this national adoption of equality. For Cheng (2001), racial melancholia originates because of the rift between the American history of slavery, imperialism, and colonization and the cultural amnesia that occurs from repeatedly normalizing these atrocities in an attempt to expunge them from historical memory. The core of racial melancholia is the fact that the United States was

founded on this hypocritical relationship; this form of betrayal serves as a distinctive characteristic of racialization. The nation's racial wounds continue to fester as the naturalization of human loss is absorbed by the body politic. Thus, how we interact racially exposes our unacknowledged and unresolved grief stemming from these racial injuries. However, this melancholic relationship with grief is not one that always operates through conscious awareness. Racial melancholia shows us how racism is not purely experienced through external stimuli, but is also internalized and integrated into the unconscious.

Freud's (1917) essay "Mourning and Melancholia" defines melancholia's psychoanalytic attachments to the ego and its contradistinctions to mourning. He writes, "In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself" (p. 246). Melancholia functions as a part of the formation of the psyche and helps to define individual subjectivity in relation to the constitution of the ego; it marks the connection between social encounters and psychic processes. The melancholic's condition is dependent on social stimuli because melancholia represents loss—that is, an external loss which is internalized and incorporated[6] into the ego. More precisely, melancholia occurs as a result of one's incapacity to successfully mourn a particular lost object, whether that be the loss of a loved one or a lost ideal. The response to this lack of mourning is for the individual to repress their painful feelings related to the lost object and as a result the lost object becomes the formation of the ego.

At the heart of *racial* melancholia is the grief surrounding loss. In this case, loss is not a loved one such as a deceased family member or significant other, but the lost object

[6] I am using the Freudian definition of incorporate which means to unite with and cannibalistically destroy an object.

instead refers to America's convoluted relationship with its racial past. Michael Brown's body, destroyed by a white police officer whose motivations for shooting Michael were rationalized by the officer's usage of animalistic racial tropes—the black man as a predatory ape—is the impetus for racial melancholia. The state frequently calls upon its own violent racial past to justify present racial violence, while simultaneously denying that this racial past exists. Racial melancholia emerges through the constitutionally warranted non-indictment of a murderous police officer, killing an innocent black life in broad daylight all in the name of justice. This perverted sense of justice is as American as apple pie; it is as central to our national identity as the American flag or the fourth of July. What becomes a constitutive element of racial melancholia is the elaborate denial of Michael Brown's murder and so many deaths like his, framed as being unrelated to the past and present pattern of state-sanctioned violence against black, brown, and indigenous people. This process of denial serves as the central nervous system of a collectively melancholic nation unable to reconcile its hypocritical racial existence. Cheng (2001) raises crucial questions concerning this continuously troublesome problem: "How does the nation 'go on' while remembering those transgressions? How does it *sustain* the remnants of denigration and disgust created in the name of progress and the formation of an American identity?" (p. 11, italics in original).

Cheng's inquiries are useful in framing melancholia as a fundamental facet of racialization and the forming of an "American identity." The very idea of racism hinges on naturalizing race and manufacturing it as essential to human existence, what Bell (1992) refers to as the permanence of racism in the United States. This process dictates that we cannot simply abolish racial categories or deny race as a social construct because

it is intricately woven into the fabric of our identity. Furthermore, our melancholic relationship with loss becomes a central trait of our racial identities, through a tacit recognition of our racial past and the accompanying benefits that accrue from white acceptance of racial progress. Mills (1997) often refers to this kind of false progress as a fabricated racial fantasyland that exists to ensure white compliance to the prevailing racial system. He writes, "*White misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race* are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement" (p. 19, italics in original). For people of color who are subjected to racial domination, we have no choice but to be engendered into a subordinate position within society. As Cheng (2001) explains, those that are racially marginalized experience a double-loss within a melancholic framework. This loss involves a subjectivity where the racially oppressed are both lost objects and the subjects that have lost. At once, one is both the melancholic object and the melancholic subject—*both* the one who is lost and the one who is losing.

The conceptualization of melancholia as integral to our racial identifications runs the risk of naturalizing racial injury. In fact, Freud's (1917) original explanation of melancholia refers to its pathological nature. Here, I am suggesting that melancholia is an endemic component of U.S. racial formations, but I want to be clear that it is certainly *not* a mental disease or disorder. Eng and Han's (2000) essay "A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia" instead describes melancholia as a depathologized structure of feeling that underpins our everyday conflicts and struggles with racialization. Melancholia's interminable engagement with loss can then "generate . . . sites for memory and history,

for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future" which then enable us to "gain new perspectives on and new understandings of lost objects" (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003, p. 4). Melancholia, therefore, is *not* a debilitating presence in our psychic lives; on the contrary, its existence acts as a site for hope and agency. Since the ego is formed through the lost object, or as Cheng (2001) phrases it, "the history of the ego is . . . the history of its losses" (p. 8), we can think of racial melancholia as the topographic representation of the psychic internalization of racism. This gives new meaning to the ways in which we theorize racial trauma. Cheng (2001) writes, "When it comes to facing discrimination, we need to understand subjective agency as a convoluted, ongoing, generative, and at times self-contradicting negotiation with pain" (p. 15). The inescapability of melancholia, instead of disabling resistance, can act as a method for representation; it can restructure how we envision the nation's racial past and allow for us to better understand our relationship with race in order to empower our struggles to combat racism.

History and the Lost Object

Racial melancholia can help us engage the psycho-social dimensions of our convoluted historical memory. Encompassing both the individual and collective relationship with loss, melancholia applies to the historicity of racialization and enables a method for excavating and recapturing buried racial histories through an analysis of lost objects. When we speak of melancholia, we express our attachments to what was lost, even if those losses are nebulous and ill-defined. What, then, is the lost object that the American psyche unceasingly mourns? This question presumes there is only one lost

object enclosed within the melancholic landscape. It implies that we are able to quantify and discern our collective racial losses. However, it is likely that we will never be able to recover and discern everything that has been lost. An intellectual history of the past can only hope to make visible fragments of memories related to repressed traumatic atrocities. Cheng (2001) has identified the lost object of U.S. racialization as racial exclusion, while Eng and Han (2000) reference the lost ideal of whiteness as a symbolization of the lost object. Although these two conceptions of loss are closely related, it illustrates the dynamic nature of loss itself, and the multiplicity of ways that it can be defined. My analysis of the melancholic lost object seeks to more cogently centralize racial violence as the core element of what haunts our egos. Establishing racial violence as the catalyst for the nation's losses more accurately enables us to identify the source of our unresolved racial grief.

Racial violence as a melancholic object may be too simplistic of a description for such a complex concept. Centuries of deaths at the hands of white supremacy is much more viscerally captured through symbolic representation. The phrase "racial violence" is simply too comfortably repressed because of its broadly conceived meanings. The phrase does not conjure the imagery that it describes; it is too easily dismissed as a signification of what has been lost. It does not cleave far enough into history's cavity to expose what is buried deep within. Benjamin (1969) illustrates the possibilities of articulating an elusive past when he states, "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again" (p. 255). Benjamin's characterization of history's elusiveness represents our palimpsestual interrelation with the discursivities of the past. The repetition of layering

that occurs through dominant narratives of racial progress and American exceptionalism does the work of repressing memories of racial wrongdoings and concealing them from our national consciousness. What remains are only unconscious traces of collective loss. Michael Brown's death will soon fall victim to this form of repression. His death will become a distant memory clouded by the ideological storm of colorblindness and post-racialization. Benjamin (1969) calls for us to capture moments, like Michael Brown's murder, before they disappear. Articulating the past "means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin, 1969, p. 255). Activists have taken this advice to heart by creating the Black Lives Matter movement in response to Michael Brown's death. Indeed, this is when the country is most melancholic, the instances when it becomes difficult to deny the insidiousness of racism.

The repression of the racial violence enacted against Michael Brown, and so many others before him, eventually leaves one's consciousness as time passes, but what remains is a stain on the unconscious. Melancholia is this sneaky feeling of something that is not quite nameable continuing to creep into the subconscious and then swiftly, or maybe sometimes gradually, returning to the unconscious. Then when we least expect it, melancholia flashes into our consciousness and causes great sorrow. It is this fluctuating, unpredictable pattern of pain and suppression that constitutes racial melancholia. There is a haunting presence in the psyche. Similar to Derrida's (1994) concept of hauntology, Frosh (2013) calls this form of haunting a temporal disturbance, "something that is supposed to be 'past' is experienced in the present as if it is both fantastic and real" (p. 2). And as Khanna (2004) notes, haunting is a symptomatic feature of melancholia that occurs "at the moment when encryption is in danger of being deciphered" (p. 25). There

is something within us that refuses to face the grief and pain associated with racial violence. This helps to explain our melancholic attachments to the lost object; the immediate discomfort and nervousness that often accompanies discussions about race brings to the forefront of our consciousness this haunting feeling. We cannot shake the past—it continues to gnaw at our psyche.

The repetitious folding of the past into the present becomes a psychical representation of how racial violence festers inside the mind. But how can we symbolize this psychic process? Benjamin's (1969) study of a Paul Klee painting entitled "Angelus Novus" depicts a portrayal of the type of historical trauma caused by centuries of oppression. Benjamin illustrates:

> [The painting] shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (p. 257-258)

The racial melancholic's "lost object" signifies a psyche that is plagued by the accumulation of loss as prescribed by a nation built on violence. Benjamin's "angel of

history" acts as a figurative exemplification of our psychological agony when bearing witness to centuries of racial oppression. The angel illustrates the complex process of racial internalization, not unlike what Fanon (1967) refers to as an "epidermal racial schema" (p. 92) or what Oliver (2004) identifies as the "colonization of psychic space." It is a psychic translation of what has been lost and the repression of these losses, which are continually piled onto the unconscious. It is a pictorial representation of U.S. racial trauma.

More closely analyzing Benjamin's angel underscores the manner in which the lost object is incorporated into the unconscious in relation to our temporal existence. The angel is eternally focused on the past, unable to fly forward and face the future. Meanwhile, the storm of racial progress continues to heave the angel into the future. The wreckage that continues to pile up in front of the angel symbolizes racial violence; the wreckage is not material in the typical sense of debris, but in fact it is bodies, corpses that are both whole and partial that have been destroyed by racism. Our consciousness strives to repress this wreckage and drive it into the unconscious. In this instance, the action that hurls the bodies in front of the angel is a symbol of repression. The angel represents the unconscious as she/he has no option but to look on in horror as the truth of our national racial atrocities amass into a giant pile of carcasses.

This conceptualization of the unconscious emphasizes the timelessness of trauma, and here we can point more specifically to psychoanalysis to help us understand this trauma. In particular, Freud (1920) explains, "Unconscious mental processes are in themselves 'timeless'. This means in the first place that they are not ordered temporally, that time does not change them in any way and that the idea of time cannot be applied to

them" (p. 32). Comparing the manner in which the unconscious resists temporal identification with the angel of history, there are parallels between the angel's misrecognition of chronological time and Freud's description of the unconscious. The angel is stuck in a time loop of sorts in that she/he is fixated on a linear temporal trajectory, but she/he is also simultaneously suspended in time. Said another way, if the angel represents our unconscious attachments to historical losses, the angel cannot make a determination of what is past, present, or future. Therefore, the past continuously folds into the present, blurring the conceptual boundaries between what has occurred, what is occurring, and what will occur—hence the angel's recognition of the wreckage as a *single* catastrophe. As the wreckage continues to be repressed by the psyche, it enters the unconscious and crystallizes into a timeless state; it no longer can be identified as past, present, or future. This is what Caruth (1996) means by "trans-historical trauma." The traumatic experience is unassimilable, fixed, and timelessly stored within the brain: "In trauma . . . the outside has gone inside without any mediation" (Caruth, 1996, p. 59).

My rather morbid description of racial trauma in the psyche is a crucial step toward identifying our disarticulated racial grief and vital to a movement to create spaces, whether psychic or social, where we can come to understand our complicated racial existence. Once again, this acknowledgement of racial pain is not pathological. It, however, is representative of how the past continues to haunt the present and prevents us from imagining a future reconciliation of our traumatic history. Gordon (2008) comments:

> To fight for an oppressed past is to make this past come alive as the lever for the work for the present: obliterating the sources and conditions that link the violence

> of what seems finished with the present, ending this history and setting in place a different future. (p. 66)

Melancholia is the "lever" that animates the past and exposes the ghosts that haunt our psyches. These ghosts are present regardless of our attempts to ignore them. They are attached to our collective egos and coalesce to remind us of our losses. When articulating our psychic fixation to the lost object that we just cannot seem to get over, we must recognize that the angel of history also cannot ignore the bodily wreckage mounting at its feet. Rather than mourning away our losses, we can instead find strength through our racially melancholic identities to face what torments us and confront the traumas that characterize our national identity.

The Psycho-social Dimensions of Racialization

The explanation of racial melancholia that I have provided thus far has been rooted in the psychical production of race and identity. In this model, the melancholy of race is an unconscious feature of the psyche, established through lost objects—lives that have perished as a result of racial violence—that function as the foundational construct of U.S. racial formations. Representing racial loss through the symbol of the angel of history enables a topographical representation of internalized racism and highlights the transhistorical qualities of racial trauma. Racial melancholia's psychoanalytic origins allow for the development of an internal theorization of race, but these psychical processes do not occur without recognizing the social context of racialization. This begs a question: How does the psyche connect and interact with the outside world, and, conversely, how is the outside world influential to our psychic lives? In order to answer

this question we must think of racial melancholia as thoroughly driven by social circumstances. This calls for a deviation from a strictly Freudian[7] interpretation of melancholia and an acknowledgment that the melancholic condition is caused by the sociohistorical context of racialization.

Through my usage of melancholia as a framework to theorize racial violence, I seek to transform the concept into a psycho-social mechanism for the purposes of comprehending contemporary U.S. racial formations. Here, I am drawing from the Fanonian (1967) theory of trauma as being both shared and cultural, rather than the Freudian notion of trauma as primarily intrasubjective and individualistic in nature. This form of cultural trauma positions the social environment as a consequential aspect of the absorption of racial norms that takes place through the cultural transmission of values, customs, stereotypes, and tropes. It posits that there is an interplay between social worlds and psychic life that racism seeps into, effectively contaminating both. Oliver (2004) refers to this form of analysis as a "psychoanalytic social theory of oppression." This positions psychoanalysis as useful to social theory and vice versa, embracing the idea that you cannot comprehensively understand one without the other. Oliver (2004) writes, "We cannot explain the development of individuality or subjectivity apart from its social context. But neither can we formulate a social theory to explain the dynamics of oppression without considering its psychic dimension" (p. xiv). Taking into account this interaction, I use racial melancholia as a concept that encompasses both individual and collective psychic processes in conjunction with sociohistorical racial encounters. Racial melancholia becomes the bridge between the inside and the outside and the link between

[7] See Khanna's (2004) book *Dark continents: Psychoanalysis and colonialism* for an explanation of how Freudian psychoanalysis ignores race.

the past and the present, which helps us to better understand the psycho-social dimensions of race and racism. I consider it to be both a normative process and what Layton (2006) calls a "normative unconscious process" that captures our cultural prejudices, biases, and hierarchies, which occur both consciously and unconsciously. "Normative unconscious processes" refer to how everyday situations are repeatedly enacted through psychic processes mediated by racial inequities and the ideologies that sustain them at the psycho-social level. Racial melancholia as a normative unconscious process positions the unconscious as essential to the operation and reproduction of the hegemonic norms of racialization.

The Corporeality of Race

The corporeality of race is a significant aspect of racialization. The history of race in the United States can be mapped by the history of the mistreatment and dehumanization of the body (Roberts, 1997). There is a distinct connection between the instrumentalities of contemporary white supremacy and the American history of the brutalization of black, brown, and indigenous bodies. America's melancholic relationship with race denies this history of bodily mutilation and devastation to the extent that there are not proper opportunities to mourn this racial violence. American novelist and essayist Ralph Ellison (1964) commented on the need for racial stereotypes to function as a method for disavowal in the white American psyche in order to "resolve the dilemma arising between his democratic beliefs and certain antidemocratic practices, between the sacred democratic belief that all men are created equal and his treatment of every tenth man as though he were not" (p. 28). Ellison's description of white hypocrisy defines

melancholia's association with unconscious denial as a means for conscious acceptance of racial violence. Ellison (1964) sees this relationship as a moral predicament and symbolizes this American dilemma through a corporeal portrayal. He writes:

> I propose the whole of American life as a drama acted out upon the body of a Negro giant, who, lying trussed up like Gulliver, forms the stage and the scene upon which the action unfolds. If we examine the beginning of the Colonies, the application of this view is not, in its economic connotations at least, too far-fetched or difficult to see. For then the Negro's body was exploited as amorally as the soil and the climate. It was later, when white men drew up a plan for a democratic way of life, that the Negro began slowly to exert an influence upon America's moral consciousness. Gradually he was recognized as the human factor placed outside the democratic master plan, a human 'natural' resource who, so that white men could become more human, was elected to undergo a process of institutionalized dehumanization. (p. 28-29)

The metaphor of the "Negro giant" represents a sociohistorical symbol of racialization. Ellison's focus on the body is indicative of the U.S. reliance on the black body for white economic, psychological, and social advancements.

I'll now move to more closely analyzing Ellison's imagery from a sociohistorical racial perspective, following his allusion to Swift's (1934) *Gulliver's Travels*. A giant black body is tightly bound to the earth, unable to move in order to escape. The black body is large enough to cover the expansive territory of the U.S. nation-state. Here, we find an extensive amount of white colonizers and slave owners using shovels, pickaxes, and other various tools to chisel away at the giant's body, excavating and unearthing

resources to build and extend white wealth. Then, when the colonizers and slave owners set up an official document declaring their democratic ethos, a moral conflict arose that exposed their hypocritical nation building. To relieve this moral affliction, whites justified the oppressive extraction of these resources by creating stereotypes that dehumanized the black giant. The naturalization of racial injury was instilled by creating the ruse that there is no difference between the black giant's body and the earth underneath its backside. The black body was portrayed as filthy and loathsome, no different than the dirt beneath. In fact, the trick was so effective that it convinced most of the white colonizers and slave owners that the giant deserved to be tied down and mutilated, and all of this was legitimated because the black body was not considered human enough to deserve a democratic existence.

Ellison's "Negro giant" and Benjamin's "angel of history" as metaphorical extensions of racial melancholia depict a distinct emergence of the psycho-social modalities of racialization. These metaphors illustrate melancholia's influence on how race permeates both our social relations and our psychic processes. They are illustrative of the blurring of boundaries across time and space that is representative of trauma. What I am referring to here is the emergence of our melancholic identifications with racial loss and the experiences of these losses as *not* restricted only to explanations of linear temporalities and ideological constructs of race when considering how we *feel* and *interact* with each other. America's incessant and often unhealthy mourning of the lost object identifies a repetitive compulsion to be reinjured, like a child picking off a scab that has formed when she fell and scraped her knee, only to fall again, reaggravating the same wound, and then picking away at the newly formed scab. Racial melancholia

defines the reinjuring of our racial wounds that is acted out in our everyday social interactions. Time does not heal these wounds, but instead the repetition of racial violence first structures and then restructures racial hierarchies. As Judith Butler explains in an interview with Bell (1999), "The [racialized] structure must be reiterated again and again . . . it has a kind of ritual dimension and . . . its very temporal dimension is the condition of its subversion" (p. 168). This recurrence of racial violence is not unlike Freud's (1920) analysis of the repetition of traumatic experience: The way we experience trauma is through a process of replicating the very same trauma we have experienced. The reiteration of racialization is psycho-social because the impact of racial violence is both materially deployed and psychically reenacted as "the destructive force that the violence of history imposes on the human psyche, the formation of history as the endless repetition of previous violence" (Caruth, 1996, p. 63).

Racial Melancholia and Education

Melancholia and Schooling

James opened the front door of Sumner High School exhausted from the night before as he rushed to get to his first period history class. He had not slept well as he replayed over and over in his head the events that had occurred earlier that day. His father had asked him to sit down because he wanted to talk to him about the recent police violence happening across the country. James sat down and listened to his father tell him the proper way to act around the police. His father was concerned for his safety and explained to him the appropriate etiquette required to hopefully save his life in the event that he is confronted by a police officer. Unexpectedly, after this conversation, James

was driving with his father in the passenger seat and was pulled over by a police officer. James said this about the incident:

> A cop pulled us over, my dad and I over, right after we had the conversation about how to deal with racist cops. And the feeling I had is that my heart sunk; I didn't know what was going on with my body. I had control over my body, but at the same time, I don't know what my body was doing. I know I rolled down the window. I got out my license and stuff, but I actually don't know what I could have, like what my body was doing. It was just so many emotions; so many things running through my head at that one time. Like so what is going to happen? How much of a coincidence is it that this cop pulled us over, right? (Interview, 2/13/15)

Even though the police officer ultimately let James go with a warning for what the officer thought were expired tabs, it still profoundly frightened James, as he perceived that his life was in danger. This racial trauma did not recede and disappear the next day as James walked into history class. This trauma is a kind of racial baggage that always remains, sometimes unconsciously, and resurfaces during moments of danger. The fear James felt during this incident and his description of having control over his body yet not knowing what his body was doing suggest that trauma is very much connected to both our emotions and our movements. The historical power of racial trauma has the ability to influence our modes of existence without notice. In a flash, racial melancholia can transform our social relations.

James found no solace as he walked into his history class just before the final morning bell rang. He discussed with me how the majority of his teachers do not talk about race with their students, and in fact, he stated that for the most part race has been

largely missing from the curriculum over his almost four years attending the school. This was consistent across the board; every student I interviewed had a similar view. Having conversations about race and learning about racism was either altogether avoided by teachers or thoroughly absent from the school curriculum. Many teachers simply ignored the racial violence that was occurring outside of the school walls or were too uncomfortable to talk about it. Students reported that racial tragedies such as the murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner were not discussed at all in their classes despite the fact that it was a topic of conversation amongst many students in the hallways and cafeteria.

James must attempt to put aside his feelings of stress and anxiety during this class period and for most of the school day. He will not have many classroom opportunities to process what happened to him the day before because his racial experiences are not seen as important in the context of his teachers' day-to-day pedagogical concerns nor related to the prescribed curriculum taught by his instructors. Nonetheless, racial dynamics are still operating psycho-socially within the school walls.

The relationships among Sumner High School, race, and James' traumatic experience with the police officer highlight another form of the blurring of boundaries found at the epistemological level of control over racial knowledge. The formation of dominant racial ideologies are not divorced from educational settings but are in fact often the very source of their existence. Various scholars have chronicled how education in the United States carries out practices of historical and cultural imperialism by distorting, misshaping, and silencing racial violence through the positioning of the U.S. as a democratic nation free of racial strife and indignation surrounding our racial past (see

Brown & Au, 2014; Grande, 2004; Loewen, 1995; Watkins, 2001; Woodson, 2000). The history of schooling in the United States is an indoctrinating location of social control rather than a place for social reform. By and large, schools function to legitimize the destruction of black, brown, and indigenous bodies while creating learning environments where it becomes acceptable to repress the death and violence used to inaugurate the U.S. nation-state. In this regard, educational settings act as melancholic institutions in the sense that they constitute areas where racial loss is eradicated from historical memory. Thus, the blurring of boundaries involves the notion that schools are somehow separated from racism or can block racism from entering into classrooms and hallways. However, when James enters the school building and walks into the classroom, race plays a significant role in his life as a high school student.

The school walls do nothing to stop racism from submerging hallways and classrooms, leaching its way into every occupiable social space, and settling into psyches. However, this description does not take into account the racism produced by the very school structures themselves. The raging river of racism is a two-way street; it not only floods from society into schools and classrooms, but it also flows from inside schools and streams out into society. Education, therefore contributes to our melancholic attachments to the nation-state by establishing and sustaining ideological control over racial knowledge. Freire (1993) refers to the techniques used by schools to control knowledge as a tactic to "*mythicize* the world" (p. 139, italics in original). Freire (1993) further explains, "The oppressors develop a series of methods precluding any presentation of the world as a problem and showing it rather as a fixed entity, as something given—something to which people, as mere spectators, must adapt" (p. 139).

The American education system becomes a racially melancholic corpus to the extent that schools function as institutions which help construct Mills' (1997) theory of fabricated "racial fantasylands," where racism magically heals itself and disappears, entrenching racial illiteracy. Schools help individuals attain what Leonardo (2014) refers to as the crowning achievement of racism—the distortion of our own reality. Watkins (2001) writes, "Education has been romanticized to the extent that . . . it appears disconnected from the world of power, partisanship, and the shaping of the social order" (p. 10). In order to control racial knowledge in this way, schools must conceal how our racial past is attached to our contemporary racist society. This form of suppression often takes place through the adoption of curriculum that foregoes authentic representations of racial histories in favor of superficial depictions of race relations. For example, as Symcox (2002) thoroughly outlines, the "National Standards for History" serve as the ideological core for establishing control over historical knowledge. There have been political and educational policy initiatives to alter these social studies curriculum standards to reflect a more "positive" depiction of American history that values and embraces American "accomplishments" while watering down more "negative" historical events, such as slavery and genocide, in order to solidify American nationalism. These standards become the difference between students reading Thomas Jefferson's writing in *The Declaration of Independence* and reading his racist ideas in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, or history textbooks declaring that Europeans arriving in the "New World" were opportunistic, kind "settlers" instead of murderous, genocidal "colonizers."

If schools are considered to be melancholic structures systematically reproducing racial ideologies that attempt to deny America's violent racial past, then it seems that

racial melancholia can exhibit institutional modalities. In fact, Vaught (2012) suggests that our inability to recognize and work through racial grief can be an organizing mechanism of structures, what she labels as "institutional racist melancholia." She characterizes this systemic form of melancholia as "the structural psychic, or affective, underpinnings of whiteness as property within institutions" (Vaught, 2012, p. 61). Institutions are structured to produce unresolvable forms of grief perpetuated by racial violence, which serve the purpose of strengthening white supremacy. This interpretation of whiteness centralizes racial violence and the resulting effects of this violence as the impetus for white land and property ownership. This is what Singh (2004) refers to as "self-ownership," or, in other words, "one owned oneself insofar as one was white and male" (p. 20). Connecting racial melancholia to institutions establishes the development of social infrastructures, such as schools, as foundational to the operation of dominant racial narratives.

When James walks into his history class there is already a prescribed dominant narrative at work that was constructed through the instillation of school policies, curricula, and teacher practices that prevent students from being exposed to racial knowledge that is accurate and authentic. This grand racial narrative is a sociohistorical component of schooling that indoctrinates students through the ideological possession of racial truth. James' traumatic racial encounter is largely regarded as insignificant within the school walls. It is racial melancholia's normalizing structure that enables this racial blindness. The forced denial of the past inhibits James from recognizing, confronting, and, most importantly, grieving his psychic injuries. Not only does James not receive opportunities to grieve, but the conditions for racial melancholia insist on the

reproduction of this racial trauma, resulting in repeated psychic injuries and the ubiquitous threatening of one's identity, what Brown (1995) calls "wounded attachments." These attachments illustrate the effects of racial melancholia's "double loss" (Cheng, 2001) on minoritized identities. James' racial identity only exists in relation to melancholia: he is at once both the melancholic object and the melancholic subject; he is both the one lost and the one losing (Cheng, 2001). The basis for his racial identity is founded on racial violence. His identity as a person of color in the United States occurs only because of racial violence; hence, he is haunted by this racial past because he cannot escape the very loss that has enabled his existence. The U.S. education system has socializing effects that naturalize racial injury, which maintain hegemonic possession of racial epistemologies rendering James, and any other student for that matter, incapable of understanding his melancholic identity.

The Melancholic Classroom

The topic of race is not something that is typically discussed by educators at Sumner High School. However, this is not to say that *all* teachers refrain from discussing racial issues with their students. When James enters his 3rd period English class he knows that he can tell his story to Mr. Turner since Mr. Turner does not shy away from the difficulties of talking about race in the classroom; rather, race is a central aspect of the curriculum he teaches to his 12th grade English students. James knows that Mr. Turner will not downplay James' racial encounter nor will he tell James he is overreacting. Within the hegemonic school structure, dominated by racial narratives that embrace racial

blindness, Mr. Turner's classroom is a space for resistance, a space where racial issues are confronted and discussed freely and openly.

In Mr. Turner's classroom I witnessed the class of students confront our nation's most pressing racial issues, including police brutality, racial violence, racial capitalism, and various other topics related to past and present forms of racism. The class engaged in many race conversations that were difficult, uncomfortable, and emotionally taxing. However, in these discussions there were also glimmers of joy and hope. During my time in his class, I discovered that racial melancholia had a vast impact on classroom racial interactions and discussions: it served as the organizing framework where the mediating effects of emotion and affect emerge and circulate. It most certainly made its presence known when the dominant narrative of American nationalism was confronted and challenged. Racial melancholia became a psychic manifestation of grief within the classroom. It took on a phantom-like quality, where it was invisible to the human eye yet there was a certain *intensity* that saturated the classroom when race was a topic of conversation. You could describe it as a *haunting* presence. Frosh (2013) explains what it is like to be haunted in this way:

> It is to be influenced by a kind of inner voice that will not stop speaking and cannot be excised, that keeps cropping up to trouble us and stop us going peaceably on our way. It is to harbour a *presence* that we are aware of, sometimes overwhelmed by, that embodies elements of past experience and future anxiety and hope, and that *will not let us be*. (p. 3, italics in original)

Racial melancholia's ghostly remains served as an omnipresent backdrop shaping the classroom environment.

The psychic topography of Mr. Turner's classroom environment structures both racial interactions and conversations concerning racism. Scholars in education have labeled race conversations as "difficult dialogues" because of the heightened emotions exhibited by those that participate in such discussions (Sue & Constantine, 2007; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, and Rivera, 2009). As a result of these heightened emotional states, often both teachers and students avoid discussing race in the classroom altogether. When race is discussed in the classroom, studies have theorized that, particularly in mixed-race environments, there are forms of symbolic violence that surface and violate the emotional safety of the participants of color (Grinage, 2014; Leonardo & Porter, 2010). Even white students have reported that they feel unsafe when engaging in conversations about race with students of color in the classroom, what some researchers have called "getting slammed" (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2012). Although rarely labeled as such, the conflicts that arise during these dialogues, I argue, are motivated by the nation's racially melancholic identity. Racial melancholia is the *source* of the perceived emotional insecurities that bubble to the surface. The discomfort that we feel is the traumatic wound of unresolved racial grief opening up once again to haunt us. We feel the ripping of the scab that covers the festering and infected racial wound. The origins of our painful emotions during these dialogues are tied to our melancholic existence.

In order to explicate how racial melancholia can foreground itself within the classroom environment, we must not be blind to the historicity of racialization and how racial trauma contains transhistorical qualities that transcend time and space. Every human interaction becomes a racial interaction when considering the nation's

melancholic history of violence. In the prologue to Ralph Ellison's (1992) *Invisible Man*, the black narrator illustrates a story about a confrontation he has with a white man:

> One night I accidentally bumped into a man . . . he looked insolently out of his blue eyes and cursed me . . . I yelled, "Apologize! Apologize!" But he continued to curse and struggle, and I butted him again and again until he went down heavily . . . I kicked him profusely . . . when it occurred to me that the man had *not seen me*, actually; that he, as far as he knew, was walking in midst of a walking nightmare . . . a man almost killed by a phantom. (Cited from Cheng, 2006, p. 121)

Does this story depict a racially motivated incident? Both characters are seemingly unaware of the other character's racial identity at the point of contact, since they both ostensibly thought the other was invisible—they bumped into each other after all. Quoting Cheng's (2006) incisive analysis of this scene can help us make sense of what she defines as a racially melancholic encounter. She writes:

> The issue is . . . the realization that because of the historic relations between whites and blacks in this country the possibility of a *racist* response haunts every potentially *racial* encounter . . . the incident becomes a racial one, not because a black man and white man are involved per se, but because of the overdetermined history between them. (p. 122, italics in original)

Projecting this critique onto a classroom backdrop, it is clear how racial melancholia becomes an integral part of *every* potential classroom encounter. The point is that the incident in Ellison's story is only *racial* because of our *racial* history, the upshot being that both men were racially blind during the exchange, but nonetheless the melancholic

wound coated the exchange with a racialized paint brush. As Cheng (2006) states, "To overlook the racist potential in the scene is to be blind to history" (p. 125).

But there is more going on in this scene than a violent encounter. This exchange is a psycho-social meeting between the narrator and the white man. Aside from the psychically traumatic causalities of the interchange, there are both emotional and affective dimensions at play as well. The nation-state's racial history creates the emotional and affective contexts of present racial encounters. This is what Massumi (2015) might call a" relational field," or the establishment of the potentiality of the affective environment as always being racial. Racial melancholia sets the stage for all social interactions to be racial in nature. Thus, enclosed within these exchanges are the lurking remnants of our racial losses. Although they may not always be consciously discernable, they are still with us, similar to what Massumi (2015) would label as a "microperception"—a feeling that is felt, but does not register consciously. The interaction between the two men on the street is fraught with angry emotions, as each man felt disrespected by the other. The emotional intensity of the moment also contains a racialized capacity with regard to our feelings established by our racial histories. Using this example as a depiction of what can happen melancholically, despite the racial ambiguity of the encounter, helps to frame the potential intensity in a classroom that directly confronts racial issues.

Melancholia, Emotion, and History

I want to speak more pointedly about our emotional ties to racial melancholia. We must think of emotion as a historically and culturally situated concept. Kim (2013)

writes, "Because we are emotional beings in history and in social groups, emotions help shape and inform beliefs just as cultural norms shape our emotions" (p. 26). What becomes the *source* of our heightened emotional states when broaching the topic of race is the historical repetition of racial injuries caused by centuries of racism. This history has an accumulating effect on our emotional lives to the extent that our cultural norms are shaped by these injuries. Ahmed (2004a) writes extensively on this topic in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. She explains the (dis)connection between emotions and history:

> It is not so much emotions that are erased, as if they were already there, but the processes of production or the 'making' of emotions. In other words, 'feelings' become 'fetishes', qualities that seem to reside in objects, only through the erasure of the history of their production and circulation. (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 11)

This analysis of emotion suggests that how we feel about race is intertwined with a misrecognition of racial histories. Our racial animosities stem from the complex national history of violence waged against black, brown, and indigenous peoples, yet how we interpret our feelings about race is largely disconnected from this history. When race conversations occur in the classroom and feelings of discomfort emerge, we are often unaware of why these feelings well up inside of us.

To illustrate another example of the sociohistorical nature of emotions, Ahmed (2004a) theorizes the often-used psychological depiction of the child and the bear. The child sees the bear and subsequently runs away in fear. Where does this fear come from? How does the child know to fear the bear, supposing this is a first time encounter? Instead of some sort of innate instinctual reaction, Ahmed (2004a) suggests that the child fears the bear because "we have an image of the bear as an animal *to be feared*, as an

image that is shaped by cultural histories and memories" (Ahmed, 2004a, p.7, italics in original). If we replace the bear with a black man and we determine that the child is white, similar results may occur. If this is the first time the child sees a black man, why would the child think of the man as fearsome? If we again conjure Ellison's (1964) image of the Negro giant, we can elucidate how past histories of stereotyping can emerge in the present. The cultural aspects of racial dehumanization render the black man just as scary as the bear, and just as animalistic. It is not too far-fetched to imagine substituting the black man for the bear considering our national history of brutish stereotyping of black men. This is what Fanon (1967) means by the black man as a "phobogenic object" that produces anxiety in those that gaze upon his black body. And maybe more crucially, this scenario explains the racial context of interaction between Michael Brown and the police officer who murdered him. The officer referred to Michael Brown as a "demon" before he shot the teen dead[8]. Ahmed (2004a) locates the production of the child's fearful emotions as not originating inside the child or even inside the bear, but the emotion is very much a part of how the child and the bear come into *contact*. Ahmed (2004a) states, "This contact is shaped by past histories of contact, unavailable in the present, which allow the bear to be apprehended as fearsome" (p. 7). This again evokes Cheng's (2001) notion of the racial melancholic's "double loss" and the emotional qualities contained within this theory. The child avoids the bear, the same as the child avoids the black man, while the black man must exist as an object of torment. The very conceptualization of blackness is a nightmarish reminder of past racial violence and these racial histories of

[8] See Sabrina Siddiqui's (2014) article *Darren Wilson Testimony: Michael Brown Looked Like 'A Demon.'*

contact are indicative of racial melancholia's influence on how our emotions are socially constructed and historicized.

When we talk about histories of emotion surrounding our nation's racial wounds, there is an unconscious desire to repress our feelings so as to avoid aggravating these injuries. This emotional repression takes on additional meanings when theorized in relation to educational histories that have sought to discipline student emotions within the classroom. Boler (1999) uses the concept of "pastoral power" as a defining aspect of Western educational values that teach students and teachers to "self-police" as a method for social control. She writes, "Pastoral power is a form of governing populations by teaching individuals to police themselves. Emotions are the primary medium through which we learn to internalize ideologies as commonsense truths" (Boler, 1999, p. 32). This form of education seeks to restrict "outlaw emotions" (Jaggar, 1989) which are types of emotional expressions that do not ascribe to normative structures of feeling. For example, pastoral power represents a type of education that would value and encourage the child to follow the prescribed normative emotional script that one is *supposed* to fear the black man, instead of teaching the child *not* to fear blackness. Discussing race in the classroom often goes against pastoral power's hegemonic ideologies of racial blindness. Teachers and students are instructed to ignore race because it is too much of a "controversial" or "contentious" subject to discuss. Still, when race is brought up during conversations, we exhibit certain emotional reactions designed to prohibit further discussion—feelings like fear, nervousness, and anger emerge and stifle lengthy race dialogues. This is a sort of racially melancholic relationship to emotion and schooling because pastoral power compels us to deny past racial transgressions by emotionally

distancing us from confronting racial violence. It robs us of emotional pathways to grieve our racial losses.

Theorizing racial melancholia, emotion, and history contributes to future research on the topic of race and education. Specifically, studies that document the struggles and triumphs of learning about race in classroom spaces can be informed by how histories of emotion have melancholically structured racial ties. This connection can frame how students like James are affected by race in both social and psychic terms. It enables us to discover new insights into our emotions in the face of a subject with so much traumatic history. The more we can comprehend our melancholic relationship with the lost object, the better we are able to address our own emotional connections to racial grief. This understanding can lead to the development of more enriching pedagogical practices and curriculum inquiries that will allow for productive racial dialogue within classrooms and schools.

Melancholia and Affect

Although understanding melancholia's ties to race and emotion is crucial to analyses of racial trauma, there is still another dimension that must be more thoroughly explored. Returning briefly to the narrator's encounter with the white man in *Invisible Man* and the child's fear of the bear, we find that melancholia frames these interactions. Both of these incidents have emotional components, but they are also mediated by *contact*. Once again, we return to bodily modes of interaction to interpret racialization. We have already established that melancholia helps to form the relational field of the affective environment, for both the narrator and the child, but there is a momentary

instance that occurs before they match what they feel to a specific known emotion and then assign language to name this emotion. There is a pre-discursive moment of contact that is mediated by memory and history—"the skin is faster than the word" (Massumi, 1995, p. 86). The moment when the narrator makes contact with the white man and the moment when the child recognizes that they see a bear both register affectively.

These prediscursive interactions are deeply connected to our emotions, but they are also intimately attached to sensation, history, and memory. Ahmed (2004a) explains:

> Sensations are mediated, however immediately they seem to impress upon us. Not only do we read such feelings, but how the feelings feel in the first place may be tied to a past history of readings, in the sense that the process of *recognition* (of this feeling or that feeling) is bound up with what we *already know*. For example, the sensation of pains is deeply affected by memories: One can feel pain when reminded of past trauma by an encounter with another. (p. 25, italics in original)

Racial melancholia is bound up with processes of recognition that ultimately constitute our emotional expressions in given racial situations. Importantly, perceiving situations at the level of affect is consequential to analyses of racialization. How does racial violence register affectively in any given moment? What do the affective dimensionalities of race do, symbolically, to how we perceive each other racially? An awareness of affect transforms how we understand conversations about race in the classroom. This is critical to realize considering that our inability to escape racial melancholia also pertains to affect. As Massumi (2015) states, "There is no situation of being outside situation" (p. 71), underscoring the reality that we cannot exist outside of either racial melancholia or affect.

Engaging the affective modes of racialization highlights the U.S. history of racial violence and its accumulating effects. Racial histories can be explored through a tracing of the repetition of racial trauma. This "traumatic repetition" (Caruth, 1996) often emerges through racial contact. Black American scholars have written extensively about the affective and emotional occurrences of traumatic racial encounters. For example, Du Bois (1995) describes the affective racial element of his interactions with white people, where there is often a visceral and painful realization that corresponds with these encounters. He identifies the first time he felt different, or knew that he was "a problem," during an interaction with a fellow classmate when he was a boy. His classmates were exchanging greeting cards with one another when one of his classmates refused to exchange cards with him. Du Bois (1995) writes, "The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others" (p. 8). Although this interaction was silent, there was an affective dimension of communication that expressed itself through bodily behaviors. The girl, with just a glance, was able to clearly communicate the problem of the color line. Through this one bodily gesture, Du Bois (1995) realized he was "shut out from their world by a vast veil" (p. 8). The girl's usage of this glance signals a distance that she feels should remain between her body in relation to Du Bois' body: I will not trade cards with you because that would mean the space between us is minimized; I may have to touch you. This type of storytelling marks a historiography that documents small encounters that define how racism functions at the level of sensation and affect. Being shut out from the world by a short glance, as Du Bois describes, represents the often subtle nuances of racism.

Lorde (1984) tells a story concerning a similar situation. She describes an event during her childhood where she is sitting next to her mother as they ride the train to Harlem. She notices a white woman in a fur coat staring at her. She writes:

> She jerks her coat closer to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible thing she is seeing on the seat between us—probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be very bad from the way she is looking, so I pull my snowsuit closer to me away from it too. When I look up the woman is still staring at me her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realize there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch. (p. 147)

Lorde's illustration of this incident contains a structure similar to the one told by Du Bois. As a result of an encounter with whiteness, Lorde experiences the insidiousness of racism through affective behaviors. The white woman's look of horror, with her bulging eyes and flared nostrils, communicates hatred; it is a dehumanizing gaze as Lorde reasons that the woman's terrified look must be because a roach is crawling between them. However, the roach was actually Lorde herself, sitting on the train in her snowsuit. Lorde (1984) explains how she felt upon seeing the woman's terror: "Something's going on here I do not understand, but I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate" (p. 148). Bodily space and sensation is also of central concern here, as the woman was horrified that her coat may have even brushed up against the little black girl's snowsuit. In this case, Lorde and Du Bois, looking back on childhood incidents, both identify, through a kind of historical memory, their early exposure to racial trauma.

This kind of microhistorical analysis of race represents the reopening of racial wounds and the recurrence of racial injury. There is a cumulative effect of these melancholic repetitions of trauma on the affective environment and our emotional responses to these encounters. Ahmed (2004a) offers a theory that explicates this relationship which she calls "affective economies." She posits:

> Emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced as an effect of its circulation. I am using 'the economic' to suggest that objects of emotions circulate or are distributed across a social as well as psychic field. (p. 45)

This explanation signifies how individual racial encounters, situations like the ones that Du Bois and Lorde describe, shape how emotions circulate within the affective environment. The repetition of racial injury creates an increase of intensity when certain bodies come into contact, a racial charge that accumulates over time and signals which bodies to fear, hate, or love. This relationship among racial melancholia, affect, and emotion becomes the determining factor in the scenario of the child and the bear. A pre-shaped affective field of understanding has already been created to indicate that the bear (or the black man) is an object to fear; the production of the child's fear resides within the historical and cultural backdrop of past racial injuries. However, the child's unawareness of the origins of these feelings speak to the misremembering of our racial past. Ahmed (2004a) explains, "What is repressed from consciousness is not the feeling as such, but the idea to which the feeling may have been first (but provisionally) connected" (p. 44). Although the child's fear of the bear is not instinctual in a biological sense, this fear

emerges through affective modes of emotional accumulation instilled as a result of the historical repetition of racial trauma engendered through racial violence.

Of what consequence does affect then have on the classroom environment? It is not coincidental that the racial encounters that Du Bois and Lorde describe take place during childhood. It is instructive that the child learns to fear the bear as a child, presumably normalizing this fear throughout their lifetime. Affect, acting in conjunction with ideology, creates a form of rationality that operates to justify the child's fear of the bear. As Massumi (2015) asserts, "They must be duped into affectively investing in the mechanisms of power that oppress them . . . they must become the willing instruments of their own domination" (p. 85). The child becomes invested in their fear of the bear; it becomes perceivable to the child that they must fear the bear in order to secure their own safety. These affective power dynamics are at work when students attempt to have conversations about race in the classroom or when a teacher attempts to teach about race in the classroom. Massumi (2015) further states, "Power hooks into the individual through feeling, and then pulls the strings that lead the individual into deluded acquiescence to its assigned role" (p. 86). A deeper engagement and understanding of our emotional and affective relations to power can support teachers' efforts to improve race dialogues, curricular materials that educate students about race, and pedagogical strategies that help students learn about race. In the classroom, a microanalysis of interactions, similar to Du Bois and Lorde's descriptions of specific racial encounters, is a useful method to more closely recognize the affective dynamics of teaching and learning. If educators can gain a more critical understanding of the relationship between the bear and the child, then they can better educate the child to not fear the bear.

Affect enables us to think of the *potential* of a particular event. No event is fully predetermined by ideology; there is always the potential that one could act differently than what their assigned role dictates. Massumi (2015) identifies this potential as "micropolitics." He writes, "[Micropolitics] seeks the degrees of openness of any situation in hopes of priming an alter-accomplishment. Just modulating a situation in a way that amplifies a previously unfelt potential to the point of perceptibility is an alter-accomplishment" (p. 58). Therefore, a pedagogy that disrupts the status quo would find methods for enabling the child to change their perception of the bear to the point where a previously unfelt emotional response to seeing the bear would appear in place of the normatively constructed fearful emotional response. The "alter-accomplishment" lies in the reformation of feelings in relation to the melancholic object that is supposed to be feared. Thus, a politics of affect exposes the perceived fixity of hegemonic constructs through the ever-present potential for a remodulation of acting and feeling within a given situation.

Paying attention to the ways in which affect and emotion intersect in the classroom can allow us to more intricately map how racial discourses function during race conversations. Hook (2011) provides an example of recognizing affect in the context of race, emotion, and discourse:

> I may express myself in a discourse of non-racist, multicultural tolerance, I may well feel genuinely emotionally committed to such values—identifying with such ideal-ego values at the imaginary level—yet might, nevertheless, experience of a set of anxious, affective, bodily reaction in relation to the physical proximity of certain others. Such affective responses remain conditioned by a symbolic

> horizon, by a (pre-reflexive) backdrop of historical values, meanings, roles and similar symbolic designations. (p. 111)

This form of classroom micropolitics enables an examination of curricular and pedagogical interventions to use in order to change the affective dynamics within the classroom relational field. As I demonstrate more cogently in chapter 4, the more teachers can decipher how structures of feeling arise within the affective field and how this connects to historically constituted modes of racial violence, the more clearly they can determine how to best engage in productive conversations about race.

Conclusion: Melancholia and Learning

Can an understanding of racial melancholia be used as a pedagogical tool in the classroom? In order to address this question we must first discuss how melancholia is related to learning. Racial melancholia denotes a relationship to grief and loss that is brought about by past and present racial violence. The U.S. puts structures and measures into place that causes a misremembrance of how this violence helps to structure our national identity. The trauma surrounding this convoluted relationship with our racial history becomes a fundamental part of how we feel about each other and how we interact with one another. A complex process of repression occurs as a means of "moving on" despite the inescapable presence of racial violence occurring all around us. When we consider learning about race or even having conversations about race in schools, these repressed forms of psychic trauma surface and influence our emotions.

What then are the psychic dynamics of racial melancholia and how do they impact teaching and learning? Britzman's (2009) conception of "difficult knowledge" or

"representations of social traumas in curriculum and the individual's encounters with them in pedagogy" (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 755) allows us to frame the ways that trauma caused by our melancholic identities intersects with classroom learning. Positioning conversations about race as difficult knowledge is a productive pedagogical maneuver when teaching about racism in the classroom. More specifically, theorizing the ways in which teachers and students can confront racial trauma instead of finding methods to avoid discomfort, is a critical tool in the classroom. Educators cannot pretend to be able to separate race conversations from the racial trauma that those same conversations elicit. If we think of the subject of race as a form of difficult knowledge, and maybe, considering the history of race in the United States, think about race as the *most* difficult knowledge, we can begin to reframe how we approach teaching about racism in schools.

The repetitious shrouding of the nation's losses, caused by the deployment of racial violence, has robbed us of our ability to grieve these losses. If we are to acquire authentic racial knowledge in classroom spaces, we need to reclaim a capacity to mourn our racial losses. Leader (2008) laments, "As humans, don't we need others to authenticate our losses? To recognize them as losses rather than to pass over them in silence? Don't we need, in other words, a dialogue of mournings?" (p. 85). What if we were to retheorize classroom dialogue concerning race not simply as conversations about race, but as dialogues of mourning? As I explore in greater detail in chapter 6, this would involve a melancholic mourning process that seeks to reconstruct and represent what has been lost by centuries of racism, while also acknowledging that the mourning process will never end since we will never be able to relinquish our emotional ties to the lost

object. Therefore, racial melancholia is a central component of our racial identities which underscores Bell's (1992) assertion of the permanence of racism. This pedagogical shift may also include a modification of the language we use to discuss race with our students. Can we find a language of mourning? Using racial melancholia as a framework within the classroom transforms how educators approach the discussion of race, which can empower students to resist racism and strive for social justice.

The conceptions of trauma, emotion, and affect discussed in this chapter frames how Sumner High School and the AVID/IB classroom functioned as a racially melancholic space where race, trauma, and history converged to influence teaching and learning. The chapters that follow more specifically engage how racial melancholia shaped the experiences of students in the classroom. However, before narrowing my analysis in subsequent chapters, the next chapter details the critical ethnographic methods I used to conduct research in the AVID/IB classroom.

Chapter 3

Critical Ethnography, Race, and Emotion in the AVID/IB Classroom: An Examination of Methodology, Methods, and Data Analysis

All observations of the world are shaped either consciously or unconsciously by social theory—such theory provides the framework that highlights or erases what might be observed. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 317)

Ontology and epistemology are linked inextricably in ways that shape the task of the researcher. The bricoleur must understand these features in the pursuit of rigor. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 320)

Introduction

As a methodological field of study, critical ethnography strives to challenge dominant ideologies, discourses, and narratives that disenfranchise and indoctrinate people in a world with unequal power dynamics (Carspecken, 1996; Madison, 2005; Thomas, 1993). This type of research espouses an overtly political message that seeks to be a catalyst for social change and contribute to emancipatory knowledge in the quest for social justice. As such, this study is guided by the notion of an "evolving criticality"—a constant and creative drive to develop new methods of critiquing, countering, and disrupting structures, discourses, and ideologies of power. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) further explain the importance of an evolving criticality in the context of the work of critical theorists. They write (2005), "Critical theorists become *detectives* of new

theoretical insights, perpetually searching for new and interconnected ways of understanding power and oppression and the ways they shape everyday life and human experience" (p. 306, italics added). My approach to researching school and classroom life involves taking on the role of a critical detective who examines formations of oppression in order to find innovative ways of subverting power.

The idea of conducting detective work in this manner is an important aspect of critical ethnographic methodology. As Smith (1999) incisively claims, "The term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism;" which leads her to assert that the word "research" itself is "dirty" because of its ties to Western forms of domination (p. 1). Ethnographic research has a long history of propagating epistemic violence through research practices (see Spivak, 1988 for a description of the causes and effects of epistemic violence). The core of this violence involves positioning the subjects of ethnographic research, in most cases indigenous and colonized peoples, as inferior to the more "civilized," "intelligent," and "modern" Western societies. The ethnographic researcher does epistemological violence to these communities by using their research to justify actual violence—i.e. murder, genocide, colonization, and imperialism—which simultaneously decimates indigenous cultural knowledge while also legitimizing colonial power. The critical ethnographer investigates power to uncover and expose these insidious techniques of dominance by attempting to use decolonizing ethnographic methods.

In the present time, emerging forms of neocolonialism and neo-imperialism are carried out through established modes of power that continue to frame marginalized peoples as disempowered victims of their own circumstances. These are based on past

ideologies of inferiority and created in part by colonizing forms of research. The United States education system has played a large role in reasserting Westernized worldviews, both domestically as well as abroad, through epistemologies that reproduce white racial superiority. Research in education often reflects this epistemological racism by positioning white histories, traditions, and social practices as the dominant framework in which research methodologies are created and structured (Scheurich & Young, 1997). This reinforces white racial ideologies while also severely restricting the histories, traditions, and social practices of non-white racial/cultural groups. Ethnography, with its emphasis on studying specific cultural groups, often falls prey to reproducing white racial dynamics by failing to properly contextualize research within a racial framework. Effective critical ethnography decenters whiteness as the dominant methodological lens for research in education.

Taking into account the complex nature of power and the interconnected ways that ethnographic research often upholds oppressive hierarchies, it is essential for critical researchers to commit themselves to understanding and addressing this reality. In this chapter, I detail the motivations, methods, and materials I used to conduct this critical ethnographic dissertation in the AVID/IB classroom. Following the metaphor of the critical detective, I explain the particular case I chose to investigate, along with the ways in which the evidence was collected and analyzed. The chapter is separated into three main sections, each of which outlines a particular aspect of the study. Section one focuses on critical ethnography as a blend of both research and theory. Here, I explain this relationship in depth in order to orient my theoretical perspective as a researcher and align it with my usage of critical ethnography as a methodology. Section two describes

the methods I used to collect the data for the study. Lastly, section three explains how I analyzed the data I collected.

Section 1: Methodology and Theory

Blending Methodology with Theory

The integration of method and theory is never a clear translation; rather, it's blurry and consistently shifting and changing. Although their relationship is sometimes messy, method and theory are nonetheless directly tied together. In what Madison (2005) calls "the method and theory nexus," she states, "[critical] ethnography becomes the 'doing'—or better, the performance—of critical theory. To think of ethnography as *critical theory in action* is an interesting and productive description" (p. 13, italics in original). When considering critical ethnography as the application of critical theory, we also must consider how the evolving nature of critical theory merges with critical ethnographic methodology. The nexus of method and theory involves a unification of the researcher's theoretical perspective that guides the creation and implementation of ethnographic research methods—writing fieldnotes, designing interview questions, coding data, and representing data. The tension that exists within this nexus occurs when our theoretical formulations do not match our empirical endeavors (Lather, 1991).

Rigorous research practices include a critical examination of how our evolving theoretical interrogations are able to be put into action through research methods that do not undermine our critical detective work. This is what Lather (1991) describes as "research as praxis," or "research that is explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society" (p. 51). The effective critical researcher, therefore, must

make both ontological and epistemological claims in order to make visible the ways in which the research they are conducting attempts to confront power. These claims work to establish the researcher's methodological position on the nature of reality and the constitution of knowledge that help to shape the critical detective's ideological stance. Considering the ubiquitous presence of the term "critical" in education research, establishing this stance is vital to rigorous inquiry, as the word begins to lose its meaning and power if everyone is using it (Leonardo, 2013).[9] Therefore, in order to resist further dilution of the term, a research praxis in which we make explicit our *critical* research positionality requires an elucidation of the ideological underpinnings of our methodologies. In other words, before we can design a framework for our methodologies and put our methods into action, we must first determine the fundamental meanings of our beliefs as scholars and researchers. Failure to do so would jeopardize our ability to put into practice and make actionable our critical methods—we are in danger of simply making critical declarations without subsequent critical actions (Ahmed, 2004b). Lather (2012) warns that often methodology diverts our attention from epistemological concerns and as a result our methods buckle under what Visweswaran (1994) labels as "epistemic failure." To ensure that my critical detective work does not fall victim to these methodological mistakes, I want to be clear about my philosophical standpoint in relation to my usage of critical ethnographic methods.

A researcher's ontological and epistemological proclamations are crucial to developing a research praxis that can challenge the complex ideologies linked to the ways

[9] I was tempted to use Kincheloe's (1993) idea of critical thinking here, taking on both an analysis and politics of criticality. However, the double usage of the term defeats my point of identifying it as ubiquitous.

in which power operates in society. If the critical researcher's goal is to subvert power, they must harness methodologies that can match or exceed the multifaceted dynamics of oppression. Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) use the concept of "bricolage" to capture the evolving criticality necessary for effective ethnography. A bricoleur works as a kind of research handyman or handywoman who uses a set of tools available to them in order to complete a particular task (Harper, 1987). Bricolage in education research embraces ontological and epistemological complexity as this complexity becomes the handiwork needed to dissect the status quo (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Although Ladson-Billings (2014) does not use the concept of bricolage in her article "What it Means to be Critical: Beyond Rhetoric and Towards Action," there is a tacit connection to her analysis of criticality in education research that encompasses the questions that bricoleurs often pose. She offers:

> It seems to me that critical is less about a declaration than a disposition toward scholarship. What are the questions worth asking? What are the methodological tools that illuminate those questions? What analysis helps to answer those questions? What further research might those questions prompt? The process is both reflexive and recursive. It is not made more powerful by merely slapping a label on it called, "critical." (2014, p. 261)

Thus, bricolage becomes the creed that the critical detective lives by as they recognize the complicated nature of power and what is necessary for rigorous research in the pursuit of social justice.

Critical Ethnography and Race

Having established that effective research praxis must address complexity through an articulation of the researcher's ideological perspective, alongside the conceptualization of methodological frameworks, in this section I detail my philosophical commitments and explain how these commitments align with my usage of critical ethnographic methodology. Indeed, these are not separate enterprises, but instead, help to construct a critical research methodology that contains a solid theoretical base. My critical perspective as a researcher positions race and racism as the most consequential mode of power influencing school culture and classroom life. This is not to say that other forms of oppression are not important or do not intersect in meaningful ways with the study of race, but race is the central ideological nexus of my critical detective work.

Research on race and education must always grapple with ontological concerns over the nature of reality, as I explained in chapter 2, the normalization of racial illiteracy is a central concern for the institution of schooling. This is because race operates at the level of ideology. Ideologies function as a way for people to exist in their day-to-day lives as they live out a set of social practices that help them make sense of their social reality. As such, these social relations are constantly being created and recreated as individuals collectively function in the world (Fields & Fields, 2012). Therefore, race as an ideological system of belief controls one's perception of reality. Racism, by extension, is a social practice, "which means it is an action or a rationale for action, or both at once" (Fields & Fields, 2012, p. 17), making acts of racism *real*, pulling these actions out of the confines of ideological racial constructs. Further illustrating race ideology is Mills' (1997) concept of the "racial contract." The racial contract codifies social practices that maintain white supremacy through the establishment of a set of power relations that are

enacted to support a system that relegates non-whites as subpersons. This contract points to the historically situated concept of race and can be traced back to the categorization of whites as superior to non-whites. The contract shifts and changes over time as it is continually being rewritten to uphold white racial superiority. This helps to achieve what Leonardo (2014) calls the triumph of racism: "its ability to distort our understanding of reality" (p. 250). Education research that does not grasp these fundamental ontologies often exhibits colorblind or post-racial methodological frameworks, which become instruments for re-inscribing the racial contract and instilling racist social practices.

Considering the ideological aspects of race, the critical ethnographer who is serious about intervening in racism must formulate a methodology that uncovers the hidden traces of racism that are often misconstrued as commonsensical aspects of everyday life. It is helpful to understand critical detective work centered on race as a struggle over control of common sense, or what Gramsci (1971) calls "hegemony." The hegemonic battle over racial knowledge is waged through an analysis and interpretation of the often-unanalyzed racial ideologies that portray racial experiences as common sense or even invisible. This boils down to an epistemological power struggle to accurately represent racial beliefs that are distorted, biased, and misleading. I again return to Mills' (1997) racial contract to demonstrate the impact of inaccurate assumptions about racial knowledge. Mills (1997) posits that the prescribed terms of the racial contract call for an epistemology of ignorance where it is necessary for there to be a misrepresentation of reality, a "racial fantasyland," created to justify racist actions and ensure racial hegemony (p. 18). Critical ethnography works to combat the terms of the racial contract through research that unmasks the counterfeit racial world, shattering the so-called "objective

truth" inculcated by racist ideologies. Leonardo (2013) supports this assessment: "The problem of race research does not seem so much an issue of producing 'better' knowledge, but of liberating people from accepting their race knowledge as natural and neutral" (p. 3).

The ability to identify, research, and analyze the intricacies of race underscores the necessity to understand race at the ideological level, but the deployment of racism is not simply ideological. Racism is rooted in historical, social, economic, and political processes that define the ideological underpinnings of race. The theory of "racial formation" describes the sociohistorical processes by which racialization takes place, that is, the ways in which racial categories are, "created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55). Racial formation occurs ideologically and then subsequently gives birth to "racial projects" or the ways in which social structures and everyday experiences are organized through race (Omi & Winant, 1994). Racial projects can occur in large and small ways, but we are all subjected to these projects; they represent the racial dimensions of our social practices or the ways in which ideologies play out in our daily lives. Macro racial projects can exist at the structural level, such as racist school discipline policies that disproportionality suspend students of color, or at the micro-level, where a student of color is suspended for arbitrary reasons as a result of such policies. Racial projects occurring at the macro-level are intimately connected to micro-level occurrences and vice versa. The critical researcher may choose to focus their methodological commitments on either the macro-level or micro-level racial project while in the process sacrificing a certain level of complexity. This goes back to one's

ontological positioning—should one's detective work focus on the structural nature of racism or individual racial occurrences?

A critical methodology that testifies to the complexities of race would find a way to vacillate between macro and micro racial projects as a means for capturing the details of racism at work. Research exploring the reasons why a student of color was unfairly suspended should not be divorced from an investigation of the racist policies that paved the way for the suspension to occur in the first place. My philosophy as a researcher seeks to embrace this complexity, but there is still another facet of race research in education that is often overlooked: the impact of racism on one's psyche. Methodological considerations of the psychological impact of race in schools and classrooms is crucial to comprehending racial power dynamics. Although a psychoanalytic analysis of race is not as easily observable as other forms of overt racial practices, it is nonetheless just as significant in the quest for emancipatory research methods. An evolving criticality in ethnography would not simply study school suspension policies or the suspension of the student; it would also take into account the psychical damage done to the student who is subjected to racism.

There is something important occurring in terms of the way we are *subjected* to racism that I feel is well worth exploring. Undertaking this type of investigation cannot be accomplished without delving into the inner workings of the psyche. Mills (1997) says as much when referring to the signatories of the racial contract as being psychically invested in racism. Epistemological ignorance with regard to racialization certainly has much to do with the structure of our conscious and unconscious mental processes. Omi and Winant (1994) also reference the psyche when explaining how racial projects take

place in everyday life through the ways we are not conscious of race. Leonardo (2013) even goes as far as to say that the truth behind racial domination is hidden deep within the psyche. Critical ethnography provides the methodological freedom to do the necessary digging to reveal how race invades the psyche. This sort of detective work has the potential to help us better understand how racism impacts teaching and learning in the classroom.

In order to illustrate the ways in which racism is internalized, I highlight Fanon's (1967) description in *Black Skin, White Masks* of a young white child frightened as he gazes at Fanon's black body as an example of the psychic trauma that occurs through racial subjection. The boy sees Fanon while riding on the train, and, frightened by the presence of Fanon's blackness, repeatedly shouts to his mother, "Look! A Negro!" (p. 91). Fanon interprets this racial interaction as an effect of a system of whiteness that dehumanizes the black body. He writes about the changes he goes through as a result of this incident: "Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far, from myself, and gave myself up as an object" (p. 92). Through being subjected to racism, Fanon undergoes a transformation where he seeks refuge from the insidiousness of the racial incident by giving up on himself—literally abandoning his "self," his personhood, to become an object. This transmission occurs at the psychical level and represents the process of dehumanization caused by racism. What are we to then make of the student of color wrongfully suspended because of racist school policies? What racial trauma was induced as a result of this suspension? This methodological complexity

provides greater depth of understanding with regard to racial oppression and the ways that racism affects students.

The ideological aspects of racialization, coupled with analyses of racism's structural, social, and psychological effects, accentuate the need for a methodology that can serve as a multidimensional framework for the study of race in education. As such, I do not wish to confine myself to a research methodology that does not allow for this ontological and epistemological complexity. Critical ethnography provides the researcher the ability to embrace critical theory's conception of an evolving criticality as they investigate power in order to disrupt the status quo. Here, I point to my willingness to draw from multiple theories on the matter of race, embracing bricolage. The theories I adopt are drawn from scholars and researchers doing work in the areas of psychoanalysis, cultural studies, and psycho-social studies. Critical ethnographic methodology provides ample accommodation for my multidimensional philosophy on the study of race and education.

Wolcott (2001) states, "Ethnography means, literally, a picture of the 'way of life' of some identifiable group of people" (p. 156). The "way of life" for cultural groups in schools is fraught with the presence of racism, and grasping the often invisible, concealed methods of its operation means turning innovative critical theory into action. This is the essence of critical ethnography. When we think of life in schools and classrooms, we often do not think of the influence of race at the unconscious level. We often do not think that the psyche plays a crucial role in the way we process encounters with racism; and we often do not consider how the ideological, historical, structural, social, and psychological dimensions of race all interact and blend with one another. However, the absence of these

modes of inquiry from race research in education does not mean that they are not operating despite this absence. Although I expound upon my use of these theories in greater detail in my data analysis section, it is important to make these declarations clear in relation to my methodological motivations as a critical detective. My dedication to meeting the challenge of confronting the complicated details of race justifies my reasoning behind choosing critical ethnography to frame my study.

Critical Ethnography and Sumner High School

Choosing to study classroom life using critical ethnography allows for a complex and comprehensive study of race. The classroom in which I conducted my research contained racial dynamics that illuminated how racial ideologies functioned to influence the ways race shaped classroom practices, the teacher's approach to discussing race, and student learning about race both informally and through the curriculum. This particular classroom was ideal for this type of exploration because of the classroom teacher's commitment to openly discussing race with his students. The students were also quite accustomed to talking about race as they had been in the same English class together since ninth grade, where learning about racism had been a focal point of the curriculum. This engagement with race ensured that the topic was a central part of classroom discussions, activities, and lessons. However, this is not to say that the explicit curricular centering of race was the only way that race was experienced in the classroom. Whether race was a topic of conversation or not, it permeated the classroom environment in a veiled, covert manner, often rearing its head in unexpected ways or simply blending into the background seemingly undetected. The critical ethnographer chooses the most salient

racial moments to capture and describe based on their ideological positioning. This type of detective work is a fluid process that changes as the ethnographer becomes more familiar with the classroom and school environment. Further, the ethnographer bolsters their awareness of how race functions by being knowledgeable of the sociohistorical context of the research site and participants.

Race is a socially and historically situated construct that influences where we live, who we interact with, and what we value. Consequently, schools in the United States have a long history of maintaining racial boundaries that are largely connected to neighborhood segregation, buttressed by discriminatory practices of redlining and sub-prime mortgage loan schemes (Harris, 1995). The ways in which schools have become racially segregated greatly influence how students learn about race. Sumner High School is located on the edge of two cities that reflect the legacy of neighborhood segregation—Clarksville and Park Point. The large upper Midwest suburban school has traditionally served students from Clarksville, a city with an overwhelmingly large percentage of white middle to upper class families. However, in recent years, students from Park Point, a city with a primarily African American, East African immigrant, and Southeast Asian population, has begun attending the school. Although both cities are considered suburbs, Park Point has a much larger population of families of color as well as families living in poverty. As a result of the increased amount of families of color migrating to Park Point, Sumner High School has undergone significant demographic changes over the years. In the early 1990s, Sumner's population of students of color was hovering right around 8–10%. This number ballooned to nearly 40% of the 3,000 students at the school identifying as students of color at the time of this study.

Therefore, the school has experienced a merging of races in that many white students from a primarily affluent white community attend school with students of color from a similarly segregated community of color. This brings to the surface racial tensions that would have otherwise remained hidden. Although Sumner is very racially diverse, there are still spaces within the school that remain racially segregated. These spaces include many honors level classes that contain an overrepresentation of white students and segregated spaces in the lunchroom and hallways. However, the AVID/IB classroom where I conducted my research did not exhibit this same racial segregation. Instead, students of color and white students were almost split in the class of 33 students. There were 16 students of color and 17 white students that made up the class. The students brought to the class various racial experiences that allowed for increased depth and complexity during classroom interactions and discussions. This racially diverse classroom was a model location to conduct ethnographic research on contemporary racialization because of the rich variety of social perspectives that the students brought into the classroom.

The AVID/IB Classroom

The desegregated nature of the classroom reflected the uniqueness of the class itself. This group of 12th grade students were a part of two college prep programs combined into one class. The first program, known as Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), is a nationally recognized college preparatory program designed for underrepresented student populations. The mission of AVID is to close the achievement gap by providing students opportunities to learn the hidden curriculum

needed to be successful in school, e.g. study skills, note-taking strategies, and effective organization in order to be prepared for the rigors of college (AVID National home page, n.d.). Another goal of the AVID program is increasing access to rigorous coursework for students of color. As I detailed in chapter 1, AVID at Sumner High School was in its seventh year of existence and had been successful in both preparing students for college and providing access to rigorous courses for students of color. The AVID program started in ninth grade and the students looped together, continuing on as a cohort through grades 10–12.

The class' second program connection was the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. The IB program employs an internationally known college preparatory curriculum designed to empower students by developing inquiring, caring, and, knowledgeable young people (International Baccalaureate Program About Page, n.d.) through all core subjects, e.g. English, math, science, social studies and foreign language, as well as elective courses, e.g. psychology, music, art, and business management. At Sumner these IB courses represented the most rigorous coursework in the school. AVID created a partnership with IB in order to help underrepresented students gain access to high quality coursework. As a part of this partnership, all AVID students took the two-year IB English course in 11th and 12th grade. Many AVID students then decided to take additional IB classes because all of these courses provided students with the opportunity to obtain college credit by successfully completing exams related to each course. As a result of combining one course with these two programs the class was officially called AVID/IB English 12.

The AVID/IB English 12 classroom, along with being racially diverse, was also a space where students knew one another on an affectionate level. The students had been in the same class together since ninth grade, and many relationships had formed as a result of this closeness. One of AVID's defining features is that it seeks to foster a family-type atmosphere where students support each other. Not only were students familiar with one another, but they also had a previous relationship with me, as I served as their AVID teacher in both ninth and tenth grade. There was also a rapport between myself and the classroom teacher as we had been friends for six years. Inside the classroom, this level of familiarity among the students, the classroom teacher, and myself as the researcher allowed for a high level of comfort. The closeness of the group enabled a depth of social history through the interconnectedness of the relationships. Students in the class, at the very least, possessed a tacit link with one another; every student was able to recall past stories, jokes, and incidents that had occurred over the course of the past four years in the class together. The family atmosphere, established because of the intimacy of the class, also generated a high level of trust. The students felt comfortable enough to be uncomfortable with their classmates. The students trusted each other enough to be vulnerable, and because they were able to be vulnerable, they engaged in discussions about race despite instances of discomfort. The context of these interpersonal classroom dynamics made for an ethnographically rich environment for the study of race.

Although in general terms the classroom environment was a comfortable location for students, comfort and trust are not fixed variables. There were times when students felt varying levels of discomfort and times when students did not trust one another. Often reciprocity and trust needed to be repeatedly renegotiated over time during my daily

research in the classroom. My researcher positionality relative to my critical ethnographic stance is important to mention here considering the fluid nature of the researcher and participant relationship. Having past relationships with the students as their classroom teacher made it possible for certain participants to be more candid about their racial experiences—something that may not have happened without a previous relationship already being established. Still, my insider research status went deeper than past student relationships because of my involvement with the AVID program. As I explained in chapter 1, I helped to start AVID at Sumner, serving as the coordinator of the program. As the AVID coordinator, I was able to significantly contribute to the established curriculum that the students were being taught in the classroom where I was also conducting my research. The AVID curriculum at Sumner reflected my philosophical standpoint of incorporating a social justice-focused framework for teaching about critical issues and fostering critical consciousness, with learning about race and racism at the forefront. The students not only understood that race scholarship was my main focus as a Ph.D. student, but they also knew that I identified as African American, and often could guess where my allegiance lay on matters of racism occurring in society. I only briefly reiterate these facets of my researcher positionality in this section to emphasize that by using critical ethnographic methodology to study race, there were specific ways I was positioned that influenced how I came to theorize race in the classroom and navigated the classroom environment as a researcher. My history as a teacher at the school, the past relationships I had with the participants, my part in the creation of a race-focused curriculum, and my already-known activist stance against racism all impacted my critical detective work.

Race and Emotion in the AVID/IB Classroom

Studying life in the AVID/IB classroom at Sumner High School using critical ethnography, I focused on the multidimensionality of race's ideological, historical, structural, social, and psychological dimensions. However, it is not possible to effectively address these dimensions without narrowing the focus of the inquiry. There needs to be a balance between acknowledging the broad ideological scope of race and being specific enough so as to not allow this broadness to overwhelm the researcher. The critical ethnographer needs to be able to identify and describe when these racial dimensions overlap, intersect, blend, and diverge in order to make sense of the ways in which race functions in the classroom. Here, I pinpoint emotion as a significant indicator of the ways in which race is influential to both the teacher's and students' interaction with the world around them. Emotions can give us clues as to how race impacts classroom life. Emotions, after all, are vital aspects of teaching and learning because feelings can both constrain and enable opportunities to learn (Boler, 1999; Micciche, 2007; Zembylas, 2005). Research has also shown that emotions are often heightened during classroom racial dialogues (Accapadi, 2007; Sue & Constantine, 2007; Sue, Lin, Torino, Capodilupo, & Rivera, 2009). As a result of these intensified emotions, discussing race becomes difficult and learning about race becomes tenuous, so much so that these dialogues can be characterized as symbolically violent and therefore unsafe for the participants subjected to this violence (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2012; Leonardo & Porter, 2010). My interest in investigating race in the classroom involved examining emotion in

the context of both formal and informal student racial dialogue as well as how the teacher was impacted by emotions when facilitating these discussions with students.

It would seem as though the inclusion of emotion, another broadly defined concept, does not actually narrow my racial inquiry. However, I define emotion more specifically here and then expand upon this definition in the data analysis section so as to hopefully avoid this sort of interpretation. I draw from Ahmed's (2004a) definition of emotionality in order to disrupt the commonly held notion that emotions are simply experienced as internalized feelings, by shifting the focus to the ways that emotions *circulate*. Ahmed (2004a) states:

> Emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So emotions are not simply something that 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: The 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others. (p. 10)

Therefore, simply theorizing emotion as something that one can *have*, eliminates the social role that emotions play within the classroom landscape. However, the psychic *and* the social are still not quite enough to explicate emotionality as Ahmed defines the term. For her, emotion is the very thing that constitutes the psychic and the social, "which suggests that 'objectivity' of the psychic and the social is an effect rather than a cause" (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 10).

Defining emotionality in this manner illustrates how emotions are entangled with past and present social histories. In other words, emotions are socially constructed. Feelings are bound with racial histories that have shaped social boundaries and

influenced how bodies have interacted with (or avoided) other bodies based on skin color. For example, whites are socialized to fear people of color so as to distance them from interacting with the racial other while simultaneously creating white solidarity (Thandeka, 1999).[10] This socialization process was influential in the lives of the white students in the AVID/IB class, which I discuss in greater detail in chapter 5. Hence, power dynamics become an integral part of how emotions are mobilized. Ahmed (2004a) writes, "It is not difficult to see how emotions are bound up with securing of social hierarchy: emotions become attributes of bodies as a way of transforming what is 'lower' or 'higher' bodily traits" (p. 4). Thus, emotionality goes beyond simply theorizing *how* one feels by asking this question: What do these feelings *do*?

With this definition of emotionality we can see how emotion and race are inextricably linked, as they are often used together to uphold and justify hierarchies of power both ideologically and materially. This critical ethnographic viewpoint opens up spaces for a multidimensional race analysis as we see the potential for racial and emotional connections that can be made at the historical, social, and psychological level. The sociohistorical context of the AVID/IB classroom becomes even more critical considering the role individual and collective social histories played in the race/emotion nexus. My previous relationships with the participants were influential in this regard, because of our affective social histories both as a collective group and particular connections I forged with individual students. Further, the racially diverse mixture of students in the class, our established trust, and the curriculum all became factors in contextualizing and interpreting race and emotion. Critical ethnographic methodology

[10] We see this dynamic occurring as the child expresses his fear of Fanon on the train. He nestles closer to his mother for protection symbolizing white familial solidarity.

was the ideological guide that allowed me to conduct this type of critical detective work within the AVID/IB classroom.

Section 2: Methods

If methodology comprises the framework for the researcher's ideological positioning, then methods are defined as the process that allows for the performance of these ideas. Methods are the briefcase full of tools that the critical detective uses to effectively investigate a particular case; they are the fieldwork techniques and strategies that allow for the gathering of data. In this section, I explain the specific tools I used to conduct research in the AVID/IB classroom.

Following Erickson's (1986) description of approaching data collection as a process of being as deliberative as possible, I strived to connect my fieldwork to discovering, examining, and demonstrating how race and racism functions within the classroom. The purposeful aspects of my fieldwork include my already-established insider positionality within the school culture, my past teaching experience with the students, my curriculum work with both the AVID and IB programs, and my professional relationship with the classroom teacher. According to Erickson (1986), a commonly held romantic view of ethnography is a fieldworker arriving in the setting with a blank slate, a pure introduction without any prior knowledge or experience of the folk-ways of the particular cultural group the ethnographer has set out to study. However, a "pure" induction into an educational research setting is a falsehood (we have all experienced schooling of some kind) that effectively shatters the romantic perceptions of ethnographic

fieldwork. Ethnographers "always bring to experience frames of interpretation, or schemata" (Erickson 1986, p. 140).

The deliberativeness of fieldwork in the AVID/IB classroom embraced the schema that I formulated through my past experiences within the setting. With my central focus being race, my insider status put me into a position to notice racial projects that other ethnographers with a lesser experiential frame may have not been able to detect. However advantageous this insight may be, there are also drawbacks. Being too familiar with the research setting and the research participants, one runs the risk of too readily confirming or disconfirming evidence in order to match one's preconceptions, based on recognized schematic interpretations. In other words, we interpret the data we are collecting to fit our expectations based on our prior knowledge of the situation. For example, I could interpret a student's refusal to discuss their opinions on race with the class as a sign of being uncomfortable talking about race with their peers. I could jump to this conclusion because in the past this same student exhibited these patterns of behavior when I was their classroom teacher. In the process of confirming this interpretation, I disconfirm other possible interpretations for this student's behavior. Underscoring this example, Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) write, "[Ethnographers] must learn to recognize and limit reliance upon preconceptions about member's lives and activities" (p. 16). Therefore, in order to avoid these research pitfalls, it was necessary for me to be deliberate but also simultaneously reflective during fieldwork. This involved rigorous self-reflection as a means of being aware of this schematic relationship.

The notion of deliberative fieldwork helped to frame the data collection strategies I used during research. Before first entering the field I considered this question: What

techniques for gathering data would yield the most comprehensive, genuine, and accurate representation of how race functions in the AVID/IB classroom? Drawing on my prior knowledge of the participants, the teaching philosophy of the classroom teacher, and the curriculum being taught during the course of the school year, I was able to anticipate possible informants and important curricular and pedagogical class periods with the aim of capturing the most salient racial occurrences. To accomplish this I employed a tripartite strategy for collecting data in an effort to achieve triangulation (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2002). The three parts of data collection were: 1. fieldnotes, 2. semi-structured interviews, and 3. the gathering of classroom artifacts including curriculum documents, student writing/homework assignments, and online discussion forums. Although these research practices are commonly used techniques when conducting ethnography in education, they are also broadly defined and contain variations and specificities in the ways they are deployed within the research setting. The remainder of this section unpacks how I used these methods and explains the intricacies of their usage in relation to the study's research agenda.

Fieldnotes

For the duration of one school year—September through mid-June—I was a member of the AVID/IB class. However, my role as a member of the class was never solely defined as "researcher," but instead comprised different roles on a daily, even moment-to-moment basis. Sometimes I would be observing the lesson being taught, while other times I would be participating in whole class or small group discussions. There were times where I would assist the teacher in planning and conducting a lecture,

while other times I would have no involvement in the implementation of a class activity. Taking on these various roles in the classroom is commonly known as participant observation. The ethnographer who enters the classroom without much prior knowledge or experience within the setting usually takes on more of an observer role until they become more acclimated to the classroom environment. As they spend more time in the classroom their level of participation may increase. Given my extensive familiarity with the setting, from the onset of my time in the classroom I frequently participated in class activities because, despite my role as a researcher, the students still saw me as their former teacher. It was already implied that I would participate in class discussions, help teach lessons, and answer student questions when necessary.

I emphasize the "participant" aspect of participant observation because this greatly influenced the way I took notes while in the field. When observing in the classroom, my notes were much more thorough and I was able to focus more on details, but when participating in class activities I did not have the luxury of focusing on writing down what I observed. Therefore, I often had to rely on jottings to supplement my memory of the events and conversations that I had with participants. These jottings involved scratch notes containing key words or phrases that allowed me to recall important classroom events when writing my fieldnotes. In addition to relying on jottings while in the field, I audio-recorded every class period so I would be able to go back and accurately capture salient classroom moments that I was not able to record on paper at the time.

My classroom note-taking was a combination of writing down as many details as possible while also focusing on emotional expressions and affective responses. Many of

my jottings included recording various emotions and behaviors related to these emotions, such as smiling or frowning. This deliberate note-taking strategy was very much in line with my research agenda, which was concentrated on the emotional aspects of race. These notes and jottings then became the basis for the subject matter of my daily field note writing when outside of the field. Another aspect of my notes and jottings, although admittedly secondary to the participants' reactions, was an awareness of the thoughts, feelings, and responses I had to certain key moments in the classroom. Whenever possible I recorded the ways that I responded to important classroom events as they occurred in the moment. My motivation in recording personal reactions was in part to compare how I may have reacted in the moment with how other students reacted, but this strategy also provided me with a sense of why something might be important before the moment was lost. If I had an intensified feeling during a classroom occurrence, it became a signal that indicated a potentially salient classroom incident that I later fleshed out in more detail while writing my fieldnotes.

The daily routine of fieldwork consisted of writing scratch notes and jottings during the class period and then, as soon as possible after leaving the site, writing field notes based on my in-class notes. The process I used for this accumulation of classroom data first began with a general summary of the day's events and the listing of particular moments I would choose to elaborate on further in my fieldnotes. Through this process, I began a fieldnote very generally, simply documenting events, and then I identified the most relevant and significant classroom occurrences. I wrote more thoroughly and descriptively when documenting these important classroom episodes, sometimes playing the audio-recording to write down essential dialogue word-for-word. On occasion, during

crucial classroom discussions or lectures centered on race, in addition to writing descriptive fieldnotes, I transcribed the entire dialogue using the audio-recording so as to comprehensively capture all of the conversation. Then, once the fieldnote was completed, I wrote a two-part analytic memo (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) that addressed my initial analysis of the day's most salient moments, along with a reflexive reflection that explored my personal thoughts, feelings, and reactions to pertinent incidents. Following the advice that data analysis should start before the entirety of fieldwork is completed (Erickson, 1986) and the assertion that the researcher's multiple identities should be theorized and not remain separate from the context of the research (Villenas, 1996), I used these memos to generate themes, make connections, and confirm or disconfirm hypotheses while amassing data. Lastly, after completing the fieldnote and the analytic memo, I organized the fieldnote into a spread sheet using the following criteria: the date of the class period, a general list of events that took place during the class period, an assessment of the initial importance of the class period, a list of prominent quotations from participants, and a list of significant details from the class period. Each fieldnote was organized in this manner in order to allow for a more simplified method of identifying and categorizing the data I accumulated. This spreadsheet played a large role in the analysis of the data I gathered.

Interviews

Interviewing was the second method used in the AVID/IB classroom to learn about the participants' experiences on a number of different topics related to race. I characterize the type of interviews I conducted as "semi-structured" because although I

carefully devised a set of interview questions before the interview, I almost always deviated from these structured questions during the interview to further inquire about interesting answers or probe for more information on a particular story told by the interviewee. The teacher and student interviews took place over the course of my time in the field and usually lasted between 30–45 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. The overall goal of these interviews was to gather data and confirm or disconfirm insights collected from my fieldwork. I wanted to either learn about topics that would enrich and supplement my classroom observations or glean new information that I was unable to obtain during observations. The semi-structured interview format allowed me to have the flexibility to ask new questions on the fly and address new issues that emerged over the course of my time in the field.

The interview questions I constructed were connected to my overall research agenda, which sought to understand how emotions and race are experienced in the classroom. When formulating these interview questions, I focused on relating to the teacher's and students' lived experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. Glesne (2006) affirms this technique: "The questions you ask must fit your topic: The answers they elicit must illuminate the phenomenon of inquiry . . . The questions you ask must be anchored in the cultural reality of your respondents: The questions must be drawn from the respondents' lives" (p. 82). In order to generate responses that reflected the lives of the students I interviewed, my questions encompassed four general themes: the students' experiences with race inside of the AVID/IB classroom; the students' experiences with race at Sumner High School including in the hallways before, during, and after school and in their other classes; how students discuss race with their families

and friends; and how students describe their earliest memories of race when they were children. The questions asking about their lives outside of the classroom helped to thicken the contextualization of how they came to understand race inside of the classroom. Whenever possible, I encouraged students to tell stories in relation to these themes as to explicate how race functions in their school and personal lives. Asking about family, friends, and childhood memories not only elicited personal stories but also helped to highlight crucial aspects of the respondent's social histories.

Another central aspect of the interviews focused on how students felt when discussing race. A frequent follow-up question I often asked was "How did you feel?" when a student told a personal story or described a specific classroom incident. This mode of questioning speaks to the ways in which emotions surrounding race can constrain or enable discourse; these follow-up questions helped to determine overall racial attitudes as well as specific discursive racial features related to talking about race in the classroom. Here, I would ask for students to describe how they felt during specific informal or formal AVID/IB racial dialogues. This was a way to match my interpretation of an emotive response with the respondent's description of how and why they felt this emotion. For example, during a classroom observation, I perceived that a particular student was uncomfortable when discussing race because of the tone of their voice and their nervous body language. Then when interviewing the student, I asked them to describe how they felt during the discussion in order to confirm or disconfirm my interpretation of their reaction. This enabled me to check my comprehension of the situation and to gain a better understanding of how this student felt in order to potentially bolster my future analysis of the episode.

The method by which I selected informants to interview was both a product of my past relationships with students and the insights I uncovered during classroom observations. I already knew the informants who were particularly racially literate and could articulate their racial experiences in meaningful ways. I also knew the participants that held more racially conservative viewpoints, exhibited colorblind, post-racial perspectives, and believed that discussing race in the classroom was altogether unimportant to their academic endeavors. Many of the students who I selected to interview fell into one of these two categories as they had strong opinions on the subject of race. Also, not surprisingly, there was much overlap between the students that had strong opinions on race and the students who were exhibiting intense emotions during conversations about race. Therefore, the participants I selected to interview told interesting stories about their racial experiences.

Trust and rapport were crucial elements when conducting interviews with informants. Two potential interview barriers existed in relation to this study. The first involved the controversial nature of discussing race with respondents. Since race is often thought of as an uncomfortable topic, many individuals simply avoided talking about the subject or treaded lightly so as to not offend. The interviews could have easily failed to yield any significant data because of the subject being discussed. The second barrier had to do with my identity as a black researcher. My racial identity as the interviewer could have had an impact on responses to questions about race (see Singer, Frankel, & Glassman, 1983). The respondents could have given less candid answers for fear of offending the interviewer or expressed nervousness concerning the interviewer potentially judging their answer. I was able to avoid these barriers because of the trust

and rapport I had previously built with the students I interviewed. As Fontana and Frey (2000) explain, "Each interview context is one of interaction and relation; the result is as much a product of this social dynamic as it is a product of accurate accounts and replies" (p. 64). Our shared social histories through our past teacher/student relationships enabled what I interpreted as willing, honest, and straightforward answers during the interviews. I sensed that many students were eager to help me with my study because of the respect that we each had for one another. These relationships contributed greatly to the richness of data I was able to receive from conducting interviews.

Interviewing students was an important part of data collection, but this study is also about the actions of the classroom teacher. I interviewed Mr. Turner several times over the course of the school year. Our partnership was a vital aspect of how I approached these interviews. We both prided ourselves on being open and honest about all the subjects we discussed. We had reached a place as professionals where we could constructively criticize each other's teaching without having hurt feelings or insecurities. This trusting relationship enabled me to ask questions or probe in ways that I would not normally be able to accomplish with a teacher who I did not know as well.

The questions I posed during the interviews I conducted with Mr. Turner reflected our shared history as friends and colleagues who maintained a trustworthy and respectful relationship. Although we sometimes discussed issues of race occurring in our personal lives, the bulk of my questioning focused on pedagogical and curricular decisions made by Mr. Turner and how he felt while facilitating classroom discussions about race. These interviews were less structured than the student interviews and more conversational in tone. The process involved a deep interrogation of the emotions felt by Mr. Turner during

crucial moments of classroom discourse related to race. I challenged him to think intensely about why he felt a certain way when talking about specific racial issues, how his pedagogy was influenced by these feelings, and how these decisions impacted students. Conversely, he challenged me to formulate methods that would make discussions about race more effective, and together we brainstormed, questioned, created, and evaluated curriculum that pushed students to be more racially literate and socially active in the struggle for social justice. These series of "interviews" did not look like traditional interviews but instead resembled a discussion between two colleagues who both cared about student empowerment.

Classroom Artifacts

My third method for gathering data was the collection of various classroom artifacts. The materials I collected consisted of curriculum documents, student writing/homework assignments, and material from online discussion forums. These materials assisted in gaining a more complete picture of racial interactions beyond the conversations occurring inside the classroom. These documents stretched the assumption that racial "discussions" must take place verbally, formally, and during the class period. This data represented race talk as a discourse that can be communicated through curriculum, writing, and virtual means. Race discourse was transmitted through the class' reading of *Native Son* (Wright, 1940) just as much as it was during a classroom discussion concerning police brutality. These artifacts served as a compliment to the fieldnotes and interviews gathered during my time in the field.

The curriculum documents collected for this study were wide-ranging; I define curriculum broadly to include novels, articles, films, PowerPoints and other types of presentations, worksheets, and lesson and unit plans. These artifacts are firmly related to my participant-observation status because I had a hand in creating and selecting a portion of the curriculum that was used in the classroom. These documents played a large role in theorizing how Mr. Turner's pedagogical decisions were influenced by the structure of the curriculum and vice versa. The curriculum was a reflection of both my and Mr. Turner's philosophies as educators combined with Mr. Turner's skills as a pedagogue, since we co-constructed a large portion of the curriculum together. Curriculum also conveys a message. Often curriculum is designed to elicit or prompt certain kinds of emotional reactions from students. This gave insights into how the teacher's and students' emotive responses shifted and changed based on the methods in which the curriculum was framed.

Student writing/homework assignments were also periodically collected when relevant. Many of these assignments shed light on how students were interacting with and feeling about topics related to race when not spoken out loud during class discussions or verbalized in interviews. Student writing was generally more candid and articulate about the emotions felt during racial dialogues than what was said during the actual discussions. This frankness and eloquence was attributable to the additional think-time available when completing a writing assignment as opposed to the pressure of thinking on one's feet during class discussions. Students were also often less nervous to write down their opinions on race than they were when expressing themselves verbally. Collecting this writing was also helpful to get a sense of what students who do not often participate in

class discussions were thinking. There were many such assignments where Mr. Turner instructed students to write their opinions and feelings down on paper before a racial topic was initiated or right after a racial discussion was concluded. This enabled students to process their feelings in the moment, when the emotions were still fresh. Homework assignments where students read, reflected, or commented on a particular question concerning race were also often assigned. Here, students could use time outside of class to formulate their ideas and work at their own pace.

The last type of artifact collected in the AVID/IB 12 classroom was transcripts taken from online discussions. Mr. Turner encouraged students to engage in conversations on a site known as "Schoology." This digital tool resembles the Facebook[11] interface; students were able to have online discussions in the same way that they would on Facebook. Therefore, many students were familiar with how to use this website and became accustomed to posting their thoughts on a regular basis. Students would also use this space as a forum to post relevant internet links, memes, pictures, articles, and other types of sources to connect what they were learning in class to topics they found outside of the classroom. Mr. Turner encouraged these types of posts, often requiring students to answer questions or find relevant news stories connected to topics discussed in class. Race was a frequent topic discussed in these forums, especially when racist incidents occurred in society and became popular news stories. These posts revealed the informal ways students were interacting with race outside of the classroom and school.

Section 3: Data Analysis

[11] A commonly used social media website that was popular among students in the AVID/IB class.

Following the establishment of one's methodological commitments and the gathering of data through research methods is an analysis of the evidence collected for the study. After the data has been compiled (and sometimes during), the critical detective must organize, examine, and evaluate the information collected from field work. It is the detective's mission to find patterns, explain phenomena, and interpret clues in order to make claims and assertions while drawing conclusions about the evidence one has collected. The critical ethnographer often uses critical theory to interpret data collected for a study. In this section, I explain the aspects of critical theory that I used to analyze the data I gathered during my time in the AVID/IB classroom.

Process for Data Analysis

My strategy for identifying recurrent patterns, thematic categories, and analytical classifications for the data I amassed first encompassed open coding methods. With this method of coding, the researcher takes the field notes, interview transcripts, and classroom artifacts they have gathered and goes through each document, line by line, to establish themes that emerge through this initial examination. Then, after open coding, I moved toward a more focused coding process that delves more deeply into the themes that first emerged during the open coding process. The specific themes that I more deeply analyzed, in order to make claims and describe pertinent findings, became a part of this process. Over the course of this coding procedure, the most striking themes formed the basis for chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 of this study. These significant thematic categories included: affect, emotion, discomfort, blackness, whiteness, and melancholia.

To further illustrate the processes I used to interpret, write, and represent the data I collected for this study, I detail my approach for the creation of chapter 4. The impetus for this chapter represented the most explicit form of racial conflict that occurred during my time in the field. It involved two students with some of the strongest opinions on race in the AVID/IB class, one white and the other black, expressing contradictory views on racial progress in America. I immediately knew that the incident would end up as a chapter in this dissertation. As a result of this realization, I began my analysis (most prominently in the form of analytic memos) after leaving the field that same day. During salient moments like this one, I used my analysis as a way to highlight classroom events that contained an obvious racial element.

For this incident, I first re-read my fieldnotes and then, as I read, I re-played the events inside my head, jotting down additional details I might have missed on the original fieldnote. I then moved into my process of coding where it became clear that I wanted to focus on illustrating the affective and emotional aspects of race in my analysis. I then focused my analysis by making preliminary connections between theories related to the salient themes—affect and emotion. Later, sometime over the course of my time in the field, I followed up with some of the relevant participants involved in the incident during interviews in order to ask questions about the specific incident.

When it came time to begin writing the chapter, I returned to my original analysis of the incident and began to interpret the data through a psycho-social lens where I was mindful of both the psychoanalytic and social dimensions of the classroom environment. Here, I incorporated various theories related to affect and emotion to decipher the presence of race in the classroom. I poured over any relevant fieldnotes, interview

transcripts, and classroom artifacts to then deeply analyze the data by making claims based on the various critical theories that informed my analysis. I used a similar writing process when constructing chapters 5, 6, and 7. However, when I say I was focusing on the psycho-social dimensions of the classroom environment, I want to be clear of what this kind of analysis entails in relation to race. The rest of this section explains the ways in which I was informed by psycho-social studies, race, and education.

Fanon and Racial Subjection

A multidimensional racial analysis of classroom life is useful in illustrating the complex nature of race and the ways it functions to oppress. An interpretive framework that can attest to this complexity requires a multidisciplinary account of race. My approach to analyzing data sought to integrate a psycho-social description of racialization and racial oppression. This type of analysis still provides room for a consideration of ideological, historical, and structural characteristics of race, but my intention was to filter these types of inquiries through a psycho-social lens. Also included in a psycho-social analysis is an incorporation of psychoanalysis and a recognition of the unconscious, which can deepen our understanding of the creation of our emotions and the inner-workings of the psyche. To convey this type of critique, I return to Fanon's (1967) depiction of the white child on the train gazing in fear at Fanon's black body from chapter 2. The boy repeatedly shouts, "Look! A Negro! . . . *Maman*, [Mother] look a Negro; I'm scared!" (p. 91, italics in original). This scene can be interpreted from any number of different racial vantage points—the relationship between the boy and his mother, the language used by the boy to convey his racial contempt, and the emotional

context of the incident. However, this encounter highlights the operation of the psycho-social through Fanon's overt awareness of his mind and body in relation to the child's racist actions. Fanon (1967) laments:

> Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far, from myself, and gave myself up as an object. What did this mean to me? Peeling, stripping my skin, causing hemorrhage that left congealed black blood all over my body. (p. 91)

Fanon's reaction reveals the devastating effects of racial trauma. Being subjected to the boy's racist language demonstrates the merging of Fanon's outer and inner worlds. Racism collapses the boundaries between the social world and the psychic world.[12] We see through Fanon's eyes the disintegration of borders separating the social, the body, and the mind as the impact of the boy's words are taken in, assaulting Fanon, causing internal damage. The peeling, stripping skin symbolizes this absorption as skin represents the body's only protection from the penetration of the outside invading the inside.

Portraying the social as inseparable from the psychic opens up the possibilities for (re)theorizing power, subordination, and resistance. The ways in which we are subjected to racism are closely tied to how ideology interpellates (Althusser, 1985) us through a discursive constitution of the individual subject. The process of accepting and internalizing racial norms has consequences for our continued racial subordination, but it also may contain strategies for resistance. Butler (1997) adds, "This process of

[12] This relationship between the psychological and the social resembles Lacan's (1977) theorization of the moebius strip where it is impossible to know when one has crossed over from "inside" to "outside."

internalization *fabricates the distinction between the interior and exterior life*, offering us a distinction between the psychic and the social" (p. 19, italics in original). The operation of power is made clear during Fanon's encounter with the boy; Fanon is imprisoned by the child's gaze and this external form of subjugation is transformed into a psychic translation of pain. Butler (1997) further explains, "Power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity" (p. 3). An analysis of Fanon and the child's social interaction speaks only to the methods by which power functions in the outside world. Strangely enough, the scene could be interpreted through a colorblind lens as Fanon exerting power over the child because the boy is afraid of Fanon. However, Fanon's psycho-social portrayal of the incident expressed through the imagery of his congealed, bloody body illuminates the internal effects of racial trauma on his psyche.

What is unclear about Fanon's encounter with the child is the result of Fanon's internalization of this racist encounter. Was this internalization an act of subordination or resistance? Or both at once? Here is where we can begin to use a psycho-social analysis to better understand the effects of power and thus interpret ways to resist power. Fanon's assessment of his dehumanization and his ability to transport himself far away from the moment can be interpreted as an act of self-preservation. His method for resistance was to acknowledge his subordination, but also to grapple with this subordination as a means for survival. Butler (1997) accentuates the paradoxical nature of this relationship: "To desire the condition for one's own subordination is thus required to persist as oneself" (p. 9). Racial subjection is unavoidable in a society where racialization occurs in accordance with the formation of one's subjectivity (Martinot, 2010). If one's subordination is

preordained in a racialized society, one has little choice but to find methods for resistance despite one's subordination. A psycho-social reading of race uncovers our complex relationship with ideology and the ways in which racial norms are internalized and subsequently resisted.

Psycho-social Studies, Psychoanalysis, and the AVID/IB Classroom

Psycho-social studies (Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Hoggett, 2001; Frosh, 2003) has not garnered much of a presence in education research, but there are great possibilities for engaging in this type of inquiry and applying it to school and classroom settings. Choosing to position my interpretive lens within psycho-social studies helped to establish a multidisciplinary approach to theorizing race and emotion in the AVID/IB classroom. A psycho-social analysis aligns with my modes of inquiry for this study; scholars and researchers have already written in the areas of race and the psycho-social (Hook, 2005), psycho-social interpretations of emotion (Clarke, 2003), and the incorporation of psychoanalysis and the psycho-social (Frosh & Baraitser, 2008). These studies have shown the potential for a powerful interrogation of the intersections of race, emotion, and psychoanalysis. As I demonstrated through Fanon's encounter with the child, theorizing the connections between the inside and the outside has implications for better understanding classroom life. Clarke (2006) elucidates:

> We all know that there is a social construction of our realities as much as we know that we are emotional people who construct our 'selves' in imagination and affect. Neither sociology nor psychoanalysis provides a better explanation of the

> world than the other, but together they provide a deeper *understanding* of the social world. (p. 1154, italics in original)

The classroom, especially in the context of ethnographic research, becomes a social location where the outside world is always informing the world inside of the classroom. Race, emotion, and psychoanalysis are always a part of the social world of the classroom (just as they are in the outside world) even if they are not typically central to a critical analysis of classroom interactions.

Teachers and students who engage in discussions about race also have this same inner/outer conflict. There are both intrasubjective and intersubjective clashes that influence how educators teach about race and how students learn about race. These conflicts point to the existence of internal struggles within individuals that occur along the bridge between conscious awareness and unconsciously repressed wishes, feelings, and ideas that emerge through classroom interactions. For example, a student's angry emotional outburst at the insistence from another student that racism is a relic of the past is mediated through several devices related to the institution of racial ideologies designed to make race a common sense occurrence, the social histories of the two students (i.e. have they had past conflicts before), the social construction of their emotions in relation to race issues, and their unconscious desires to either prove that racism exists or repress the existence of racism. Here, we see a blending of socially constructed realities related to race and emotion. Psycho-social studies illustrates how these social constructions psychically manifest themselves in the classroom.

A psychoanalytic engagement with psycho-social studies in education introduces a language for better understanding motivations related to the ways we engage with

difficult subjects such as race. Frosh and Baraitser (2008) explain that the concern of psycho-social studies is with "the interplay between what are conventionally thought of as 'external' social and 'internal' psychic formations has resulted in a turn to psychoanalysis as the discipline that might offer convincing explanations of how the 'out-there' gets 'in here' and vice versa" (p. 347).[13] The psycho-social turn to psychoanalysis opens up a space to allow for the consideration of the unconscious as an analytic feature for representing the inside and its relationship with the outside. It opens up a new field of possibilities for investigating why Mr. Turner or individual students in the class felt uncomfortable discussing certain racial topics or avoided them altogether: because the unconscious is a storage space for "our most disturbing ideas and impulses, ideas and impulses that we would find abhorrent and disturbing, to say the least, should we be directly confronted with them" (Parker, 2004, p. 141). When a student claims they feel uncomfortable talking about race, they possess any number of defense mechanisms to deal with these feelings, unconscious repression being one of the most common.

In classroom discussions about race, the social aspects of the interactions are apparent, but what is less apparent are the unconscious elements of racialized discourse. Leonardo (2013) claims that racial truths are hidden deep within the psyche; therefore, it is important to be able to speculate how unconscious repression may prevent prolonged and engaged racial discussions. Mills' (1997) conception of "epistemological ignorance" also possesses unconscious components. Here, individuals are motivated to repress racial truths to maintain their dominant status without the guilt and shame associated with

[13] Psychoanalysis is not the only type of psychology used with psycho-social studies. I am choosing to use this particular psychological discipline because of the scholarship that already exists on the topics of psychoanalysis, emotion, and race.

conscious awareness of their oppressor identities. Thus, unconscious repression serves the same purpose for one's inner world that ideology serves for one's outer world—they both operate to make us unaware of hegemony. Layton (2006) refers to "normative unconscious process" that do the internal work of securing the acceptance of norms established by the external world. Clarke (2006) adds, "What makes us 'unfree' is that we are driven by both internal and external forces that we are not aware of. Internal forces are covered by repression; external forces are masked by ideology" (p. 1157). The unconscious enables us to use the language of psychoanalysis to name these invisible inner forces working to oppress us, unbeknownst to our conscious selves, in relation to the outer forces functioning to achieve the same results. Using this interpretive lens to examine race in the AVID/IB classroom can help find pathways for more effective pedagogical practices and improved curricular materials that enrich the ways in which students learn about race.

Psycho-social Studies and Emotion

The idea that the inside is inseparable from the outside and vice versa underscores a theory of emotion that extends beyond the common assumption that feelings originate inside the body and then emanate out. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2004a) declares that emotions are the very thing that constitutes the inside and outside. She explains her argument as such:

> In suggesting that emotions create the very effect of an inside and an outside, I am not then simply claiming that emotions are psychological *and* social, individual *and* collective. My model refuses the abbreviation of the 'and'. Rather, I suggest

> that emotions are crucial to the very constitution of the psychic and the social as objects . . . In other words, emotions are not 'in' either the individual or the social, but produce the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and the social to be delineated as if they are objects. (p. 10, italics in original)

This conception of emotion aligns with the very idea of psycho-social studies. Ahmed urges us to think of emotions as creating the boundaries that indicate that there even is a psycho-social; the psychological and the social are effects of feeling rather than causes. In Fanon's example, it was only through the encounter with the child that he became aware of his body, through the sensation of extreme pain caused by the child's actions. The painful feeling alerted Fanon to the ways in which the child's gaze impressed upon his body, which made him consciously aware of the black surface of his skin. The feeling manifested an inflated awareness of the corporeal. Fanon (1967) states, "In the train, it was a question of being aware of my body, no longer in the third person but in triple" (p. 92). This magnified awareness of the bodily surface was only made possible through the social exchange between Fanon and the child and the feelings generated from this exchange accentuating the social dimensions of emotion. The impression of pain was caused by the oppression of the social exchange. Ahmed (2004a) characterizes this effect simply through a description of stubbing her toe on the table. It is only through this painful encounter with the table that surfaces are felt as being there in the first place; exteriors are established through both the surface of the table as the object causing the pain and the surface of her toe through the feeling of discomfort (Ahmed 2004a).

From these examples we see how pain specifically, but also any other emotion for that matter, is bound with how we inhabit the world. As our bodies impress upon others,

we tend to avoid those bodies that make us uncomfortable and gravitate toward the bodies that give us pleasure. Our emotional attachments to race are evident from this reading of emotionality. The child's fearful emotions compelled him to attempt to create distance between his white body and Fanon's black body. One could infer that, based on this encounter, the child would desire to avoid any future encounters with blackness. This type of analysis describes the circulation of emotions that occur during classroom racial dialogues but also goes some way toward explaining the deployment of emotions to achieve certain ends. Emotions expressed individually or collectively have an effect on the classroom learning environment. There may be a number of different reasons why a white student cries during a conversation about white privilege, but regardless of the reasons behind the tears, the crying may change the course of the discussion, diverting the attention of the teacher away from the objective of the discussion and toward addressing the feelings of the student who is crying, effectively sabotaging learning opportunities for the rest of the class. Emotions, then, become a powerful tool that can be wielded to secure hierarchies and maintain the status quo.

The effects of emotive expressions are vital to understanding the dynamics of the classroom, but so are the causes of these emotions. Where do emotions come from? A psycho-social engagement with emotionality assists in discovering the causes of emotional responses. Here, we can focus more critically on the socially constructed nature of emotions, which lends itself to a psycho-social examination of the dynamics of feeling. Commenting again on pain, Ahmed (2004a) notes, "The sensation of pain is deeply affected by memories: one can feel pain when reminded of past trauma by an encounter with another" (p. 25). So one cause for why we feel pain is associated with our

memories of past painful experiences. This connection to feeling seems to have a clear link with childhood as an avenue for the construction of what one is supposed to feel in a given situation. We can again evoke the image of the frightened child staring in fear of blackness. This is no doubt a traumatic experience for the white child as I explore more thoroughly in chapter 5, and the experience will thus contribute to the intensity of emotions felt towards blackness for many years to come. After all, emotions are not simply pre-existing biological responses, but are responses learned through cultural experience. Clarke (2003) writes, "The emotion that someone would feel in a given situation is a cognitive response to how they would be expected to feel" (p. 146). This explanation adds another layer to the sociohistorical context of emotions. One's personal history certainly plays a role in how they feel in a given situation, but what about how they are expected to feel? Our learned expectations for feeling can of course pre-date our existence as individuals. Therefore, personal history is only one aspect of how our emotions are socially constructed. We must dig into the cultural history of a particular society to reach the core of how we learn to feel.

The key to understanding the psycho-social production of emotion in a racial context necessitates a sociohistorical engagement with the origins of racism and the process of racialization that occurs because of this history. I turn to psychoanalysis in order to represent this history. I argue that a theorization of the causes of our learned emotions surrounding the topic of race is possible by using racial melancholia to symbolize the psychic injuries incurred by racism. As I explained in chapter 2, this relationship between race and melancholia has been explored to illustrate the United States' complex history of racial oppression (Cheng, 2001; Eng & Han, 2000). This

psychoanalytic concept offers a way to connect historical modes of racialization with present racial ideologies. The psycho-social becomes the analytical link between the ways that racial trauma manifests and takes shape through our emotions. This engagement with racial histories enables us to theorize the source of intense emotions related to racial dialogues.

The psycho-social can be used to comprehend the histories of our emotional world and the effects that our expressions have on how we discuss race in the classroom, but how can we grasp the intensity of these feelings? When a student says they are uncomfortable discussing race in the classroom, how can we determine the intensity of their discomfort? Psychoanalysis can again help us to expand the language we use to identify the emotions we feel. This expansion is needed because of the limitations of language's ability to accurately explain our feelings. Boler (1999) writes:

> One of the most slippery features of emotions is that they seem at times to exceed or defy language. Psychoanalysis . . . attempt[s] to explain the relationship between what we can and cannot say, what is conscious and what seems to be inaccessible to our consciousness and thus our language. (p.16)

The inclusion of psychoanalysis within the study of the psycho-social enhances the researcher's ability to describe how participants feel because it allows for a consideration of how the unconscious is influential to the ways we consciously express ourselves through language. The language of psychoanalysis—concepts such as desire, repression, projection, introjection, neurosis, and abjection—adds richness to an examination of emotions, which improves the researcher's analytic capabilities.

Conclusion: The Limitations of Psycho-social Studies

In the midst of coding data for the purpose of making claims, affirming theories, and interpreting information, I wanted to tread lightly when analyzing data in the context of using a psycho-social theoretical lens in general and more specifically in my usage of psychoanalysis. Critical ethnographic methodology does not claim to make generalizable truths across different social contexts. Instead, it allows for an investigation of a specific social location and a deep examination of the cultural group that functions within that location. Similarly, psychoanalysis does not work to seek truth; with psychoanalysis, truth is always in flux and constantly changing. Parker (2003) elucidates this relationship to truth:

> Psychoanalysis is not the truth about ourselves that we have only now discovered but something that has become true, and could once again in the future become untrue. There are a number of different vantage points on this process of studying this strange dialectical 'truth' status of psychoanalysis. (p. 30)

The representation of truth is always tenuous when it comes to psychoanalysis, but this does not mean that psychoanalysis did not play an important role in my study of race in the AVID/IB classroom. The psycho-social enables us to name, locate, and theorize the unseen and taken-for-granted aspects of classroom life, while making connections to how this drives behavior in the outside world. It allows for an expansion of our critical vocabulary with the inclusion of the unconscious and psychoanalytic languages. This has the potential to transform the ways we think about race in the context of our emotional

worlds. Therefore, the potential benefits of using psychoanalysis and the psycho-social far outweighed any potential drawbacks.

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology, methods, and data analysis strategies I used to frame this study. I used critical ethnographic methodology to study race in the AVID/IB classroom. In justifying my usage of this methodology, I strive to make a contribution to how we think about our curricular and pedagogical methods in relation to our racial experiences. My hope is that researchers in education will more seriously consider how psycho-social studies and psychoanalysis can contribute to research on race in education. The rest of this dissertation provides a critical examination of the AVID/IB classroom using the aforementioned methodological practices. In particular, the next chapter explores how both emotion and affect became a crucial factor in Mr. Turner's attempt at facilitating a class discussion of racial progress in American since the 1930s.

Chapter 4

The Micropolitics of Racial Melancholia: Affective Formations and the Pedagogical Encounter

So we may walk into the room and "feel the atmosphere," but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we might say that the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point. The pedagogic encounter is full of angles (Ahmed, 2010, p. 37).

Introduction

The theory of melancholia as a "constellation of affect" illuminates the "tension between the past and the present, between the dead and the living" (Eng & Kazanjian, 2003, p. 1). These tensions arise from the melancholic relationship between history and racism. There is often an imperceptibility surrounding this tension; feelings slowly emerge within us or sometimes suddenly appear, seemingly in ways that we cannot explain. These tensions manifest in the feeling that a person of color unexpectedly acquires when realizing they are being followed by a police squad car or the dread they feel when being racially profiled in a department store. During these moments there is a shift in atmosphere: a casual joy-ride turns into an anxiety-riddled car trip; the department store clerk transforms a fun shopping spree into a nightmarish reminder of one's skin color. Alternatively, sometimes the atmosphere is predetermined to contain a racial register. For example, when one finds oneself driving below the speed limit on the highway or making sure they keep their hands out of their pockets as they stroll through

the jewelry store—all in hopes of avoiding racially-motivated encounters. As Ahmed (2010) notes in the above quote, these situations are "angled."

However, what may be of the upmost importance for the purposes of this chapter is Ahmed's (2010) assertion that "the *pedagogic* encounter is full of angles." Ahmed's description of the critical formulation of pedagogic maneuvers as "angled" contains significant implications for teaching and learning about race in the classroom. For instance, in what ways are affects racially angled, how do these angles influence the pedagogue, and what emotions are produced as result of these angles that may either inhibit or promote classroom learning opportunities? I engage this series of questions by examining a specific classroom pedagogical encounter where Mr. Turner and two students, Nick and Richard, engage in a racial discussion that is contextualized by what I term *melancholic affects*, which produced intensified emotional responses during the conversation.

The chapter first describes what is commonly known as the "affective turn" (Clough & Halley, 2007) recently taken up in the social sciences and humanities and places it within the context of educational scholarship on race and racism. I then more closely study how formations of racial melancholia are influential to understanding affect and the pedagogical encounter. Using Mr. Turner's conflict with Nick and Richard as the source of my analysis, I argue that racial melancholia is a useful tool for uncovering methods in which technologies of whiteness are mobilized to interrupt critical racial dialogues in the classroom. I end with a discussion of how "working" the pedagogical angles can be used to disrupt hegemonic constructions of whiteness through the

production of alter-accomplishments (Massumi, 2015) that represent affective practices of anti-racism.

Affect, Race, and (Classroom) Space

The study of affect has experienced a reemergence in the past decade within the social sciences and humanities where scholars have sought to better understand and theorize the context and transmission of bodily energies, intensities, feelings, and emotions (Brennan, 2004; Gregg & Siegworth, 2010). Theories of affect have also been used to conceptualize race in ways that consider ontologies of racialization in conjunction with epistemological, material, and discursive forms of racism (Lim, 2010; Saldanha, 2006; 2010). Still other studies define affective formations within the realm of psychoanalytic accounts of race and subjectivity (Ahmed, 2004a; Hook, 2005). These various studies are characteristic of the many theories of affect that encompass the field of critical affect studies (Rice, 2008) as there is not one single generalizable theory of affect, nor should there be, considering "the tensions, blends, and blurs" of affective environments (Gregg & Siegworth, 2010, p. 4). However, what may be the most enduring contribution of the affective turn is the recognition of the corporeal as dynamically interconnected to the socio-political (Zembylas, 2014).

Stemming from Baruch Spinoza's (2001) foundational proclamation that affect is defined as the body's capacity to affect and be affected, I make central the modes in which bodies are mobilized within classroom spaces as inextricably linked to theorizing racial encounters through a psycho-social lens. Centralizing the movement of bodies within racial interactions foregrounds an analysis of affective formations in the classroom

and enables an articulation of the ways in which affective forces are organized to achieve certain ends. This theorization of the corporeal dimensions of the classroom allows for representations of race that uncover ontological conceptualizations of racialized bodies rather than solely focusing on the discursive, emotional, and/or ideological modes of racism. In other words, we cannot fully comprehend epistemological theories of race without considering ontologies of racialization. The study of affect instead positions historical assemblages (Zembylas, 2014) as the critical backdrop for the methods in which epistemologies of race are deployed in classroom spaces, including the ways we think, talk, and feel about racism.

Zembylas (2014) argues that not only is race an affective formation, but that these affective forces represent the reproduction and normalization of racial power dynamics as a result of historically situated modes of racialization in schools. Thus the mapping of racial affects must take into account histories of racial encounters in much the same way that Ahmed (2004a) describes the child's encounter with the bear[14]. That is, the ostensible forest in which the child meets the bear is an affective environment containing pre-discursive and pre-emotive modalities and situated within the context of social space. In other words, affect precedes emotion and discourse (Hook, 2011). Recalling the description of the child and the bear I provided from chapter 2, the child fears the bear not because of a naturalized biological reaction, but rather because fear has been engendered through cultural histories associated with past representations of contact between humans and bears, through cultural stereotypes, folklore, myths, etc. Therefore, children are conditioned over time to fear bears, which helps to frame affective

[14] In chapter 2 I explained how the child symbolizes white children, while the bear represents blackness.

encounters. Similarly, our racial histories become infused into affective formations. The affective relational field is blanketed with racial ideology during every human interaction. However, the child and the bear metaphor only goes so far in illustrating the affective politics of classroom life. If the child is fearful of bears lurking in the forest then why go into the forest at all?

Answering this question requires us to explore how race moves in what Tarc (2013) labels as "intimate space" in order to be attentive to "the dehumanizing distance that race creates" as a result of racism's attachments to affect (p. 380). Quite simply, if the child knows that bears are located in the forest, then the child will avoid going into the forest altogether. But what if the child is *forced* to go into the forest and occupy space with bears? The affective politics of multi-racial schools and classrooms dictate that students from different racial backgrounds must share the same social space. It is certainly not a coincidence that the visceral and brutal descriptions of the sting of white supremacy endured by Fanon's (1967) experience of a white child gazing upon his body in horror I discussed in chapter 3 and Lorde's (1984) explanation of a white woman becoming terrified to even sit next to her that I depicted in chapter 2 *both* take place on a train. Trains and classrooms are both intimate and enclosed environments that require racialized bodies to be in contact with one another.

Within classroom space, racial encounters are saturated with affects, but perhaps unlike the child encountering (or avoiding) the bear, affective formations are not always easy to identify and are not always explicitly connected to racism. The dynamic and energetic environment of classroom life exhibits affects which are subtle, nuanced, and implicitly shifting and changing. If we are to capture the patterns of movement that

circulate to compel individuals and groups to form investments and attachments to normalized racial practices, then we must shift our focus away from solely relying on discursive theorizations of racial encounters. Instead, we must make the critical move toward conceptualizing the body in relation to the socio-political. To make this point more clear, the shift from discourse to the corporeal parallels shifting from epistemological to ontological—the representation of affect is not reducible to understanding the ways we come to know about race; it must also include the ways we come to be racialized, the subjectification of our racial identities. Hook (2011) further explains:

> the strategic conduction of affect can function as an oblique mode of ontological production, This is a mode of production, a means of constituting subjects that is capable of effecting passionate attachments—and equally powerful divisions—that often speak louder than words and that typically feel as if they predate the immediate history of either subject or community. (p. 113)

The affective formation of racialized classroom space is structured through patterns of behavior that function to maintain normalized constructions of racism. The pedagogical disruption of these hegemonic constructs may need to involve a symbolization of the ontological qualities that form these affective formations. Racial melancholia can be a useful theory when analyzing these affective modalities.

Melancholic Affects

Racial melancholia's relationship to trauma and history enables an ontologically-based analytical device that can be used to unveil normatively structured affective

formations in the classroom. The repeated aggravation of past and present racial wounds that come to frame racial encounters, bodily movements, and the feelings that these movements and encounters invoke underscore the psycho-social reproduction of trauma. Melancholia's connection to affect highlights the notion that "every *intra*subjective process is potentially an intersubjective exchange" (Cheng, 2006, p. 126, italics in original). The intrasubjectivity of racial melancholia refers to how the dead remain inside us—how the history of our racial losses become the formation of the ego itself. The encryption of these losses within us is significant when theorizing intersubjective racial encounters and how these encounters are shaped by racial preconceptions. The "angling" of affects is psycho-socially connected considering the American history of racial transgressions and the ways in which these transgressions continue to haunt society. For example as Cheng (2006) illustrates, "The 'personal' or the 'individual' is always potentially colored by historical relations and contingencies" (p. 126). Thus bodies, behaviors, and feelings are not separate or outside of the nation's complex racial history; rather, they are shaped by these histories and form the manner in which we interact racially.

The racially melancholic subject is tormented by the festering of past racial wounds through the inability to work through and properly mourn the internalization of grief. As a result, this grief is often repressed and driven into the unconscious as a means of resisting conscious recognition of the terror of white supremacy. However, what happens when racial realities are brought to the forefront of one's consciousness, where racism cannot be ignored any longer? These instances of confronting racial traumas engage the interplay between the intrasubjectivity of psychic processes and the

intersubjective context of racial encounters. Affect's role in these encounters establishes the *potential* (dis)connectivity of the subject(s) within a given relational field. Massumi (2015) explains, "So what you are, affectively, isn't a social classification—rich or poor, employed or unemployed—it's a set of potential connections and movements that you have, as a function of those classifications, but always in an open field of relations" (p. 40). The most prominent "social classification" when directly confronting racism is indeed our racial identifications which function affectively by providing or restricting a certain degree of freedom or power within a given encounter depending on one's racial identity.[15] For instance, these gradations can be as faint as an airplane passenger's subconscious nervous reaction to sitting next to someone wearing a turban or as penetrating as the bullets of a police officer's weapon firing at a 12-year-old boy playing with a toy gun.[16] Either way, racial affects play a key part in the movements, behaviors, and feelings of social interactions.

Within the classroom racial affects operate in multi-faceted, complex, and often subtle ways through bodily movements, sensations, and feelings mediated by our racial classifications. The dynamics of racial melancholia include the shifting of affective intensities and energies in relation to the (re)aggravation of our racial wounds. That is, the force of our feelings regarding race is affectively connected to the emergence of past racial injuries in the present. Guided by Cheng's (2001) proclamation that we feel the most melancholic when we are confronted with the shamefaced reality of racism, I call

[15] This is not to say that other social classifications do not intersect, overlap, and interlock with race, which speaks to the elaborate blends and blurs of affective politics.

[16] As in the case of Tamir Rice. Shot dead by a police officer who believed his toy gun was a real gun.

these intensities *melancholic affects*. To further explain, when we are confronted with the ghosts of our racial past, when the racial trauma we have repressed bubbles to the surface, when we detect the angel of history bearing witness to the wreckage of racial violence, the affective register is altered and in an instant there is a micro-perception (Massumi, 2015) or a sensation that takes place bodily before it reaches conscious recognition. Then our perception of the affective event is expressed through feelings because emotion translates into our conscious perception of an affective experience. A melancholic affect can be described as the moment when the atmosphere in the room changes or what Brennan (2004) refers to as the *transmission of affect*. The intensity of the room is altered by confronting racism: there is an occurrence of collective discomfort, anxiety, or nervousness, similar to when one describes the energy of a situation as so intense that one could cut the (racial) tension with a butter knife.

Classroom melancholic affects embody Ahmed's (2010) assertion that pedagogy is full of angles through the evocation and transmission of racial trauma within teaching and learning. The pedagogic encounter in the context of teaching and learning about race in the classroom has the potential to reproduce normative racial dynamics, but it also has the potential to elicit an alter-accomplishment (Massumi, 2015) which disrupts hegemonic formations of racialization, indicating that perhaps a fundamental element of anti-racist pedagogy may be to better understand how affective classroom politics function in the context of racial melancholia. For instance, could the pedagogue design and implement a race-focused curriculum that produces alter-accomplishments? The persistent barrier to this type of pedagogy is that the normative response to having discussions about racial issues is typically resistance, discomfort, and disengagement.

The consequence is that the deeper we dive into learning about race, the more we unlock previously repressed racial trauma and thus the more difficult learning becomes (but nonetheless, through sustained dialogue this kind of learning can be liberating). For example, often during surface-level race conversations, whites feel as though they have made progress and that learning has occurred, while people of color often become frustrated with the lack of racial literacy that whites exhibit. The end result is only the illusion of equality—the affective environment simply became a reproduction of whiteness. Then, when race conversations begin to go more in-depth, white students often become resistant to learning by using a plethora of affective techniques to avoid facing their traumas. The task of the anti-racist pedagogue is to adjust the relational field to allow for the potential for alter-accomplishments to take place within the classroom in order for critical race dialogues to evolve and progress. This is by no means easy to achieve and involves much effort, but it is nonetheless vital to disrupting hegemonic racial constructs. The next section documents the complexity of racial melancholia's attachment to affect and the nuanced nature of racial encounters within the classroom.

The Micropolitics of Classroom Life

Exploring affect in classroom space requires a kind of moment-to-moment analysis that captures the active and energetic landscape of the relational field. Within the context of the classroom, bodies are in motion often at rapid speeds in ways that are mediated by historical, psychic, and social processes, which blend together in multifaceted layers. I employ classroom micropolitics (Massumi, 2015) in order to identify areas of weakness within affective spaces by finding "the degrees of openness in

any situation, in hopes of priming an alter-accomplishment" (Massumi, 2015, p. 58). This methodological inquiry is similar to microethnography (Garcez, 2008) where I pay close attention to the embedded ebbs and flows of social interactions between participants in the classroom. However, my analysis also includes the undercurrents of race, power, and ideology that always permeate affective environments. A micro-analysis of classroom interactions enables us to make sense of the constantly changing web of affective formations, since "affect more often transpires within and across the subtlest of shuttling intensities: all the miniscule of molecular events of the unnoticed" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2). Through the deconstruction of a brief classroom interaction that took place during a discussion about racial progress, I highlight the meaningful ways in which racial melancholia became an influential mode of interaction in the context of affective politics.

Context and Background of the Encounter

The AVID/IB class had just completed a unit on the Richard Wright (1940) novel *Native Son*. In this unit, Mr. Turner taught lessons related to racial violence, race and capitalism, and the history of 1930s Chicago, including the growth of communism within black spaces. He proceeded to devise a lesson that would enable students to discuss how far the nation has progressed in achieving racial equity since the 1930s. He wanted to find a method for students to think and talk critically about the overt violence of the Jim Crow era and connect this violence to issues involving police brutality and other forms of public displays of racism occurring in present-day American society. In order to achieve this level of analysis he instructed students to write their opinion about the topic by posing the following question:

> What would Richard Wright say about the progress (or lack thereof) we have made as a society since the publication of *Native Son*? (Fieldnotes, 2/23/15).

The next class period, he asked students to identify a number on a scale between 1 and 10 as to how far they believe the country has progressed racially since *Native Son*. He then asked the class to locate themselves on an imaginary continuum around the room, with one corner of the room representing 1 (no progress since the 1930s) and the opposite corner representing 10 (racial equity has been achieved). Mr. Turner chose this structure for the discussion because he thought it would provide a visual representation that would allow for the class to see where everyone stands on the topic, but also he encouraged students to change their position on the continuum if their classmates' responses were persuasive enough.

The class rose out of their desks to move to their prospective spots on the continuum. The majority of the class was clustered between about 4-6 on the scale, while just a few students located themselves on the opposite ends of the continuum in the 1-3 or 7-10 range. Mr. Turner facilitated the discussion by asking for students to volunteer their opinions. After a student offers a thought, his customary pedagogical strategy during discussions about race is to summarize the response in his own words, in order to ensure he understood what the student was saying and also to make sure the rest of the class understood the student's answer. The most common thoughts students gave referred to racial progress being made over time. For example, one student said:

> I think what we are learning now in school about race is what we are going to teach our children. Like the younger generations are less racist than our grandparents. (Fieldnotes, 2/23/15)

The discussion took place over the course of about 15 minutes with no student changing their position on the continuum. I could sense an overall feeling of nervousness during the discussion through the body language of several students and the careful, reluctant responses being given, as if students were afraid of saying something that would offend or challenge someone's viewpoint. Even I felt a certain level of tenseness as students shared their perspectives. The conversation culminated with an interaction between Mr. Turner and two students on opposing ends of the continuum, Nick and Richard. The specificities of this interaction are important to expound upon.

Mr. Turner's Pedagogical Racial Encounter

Mr. Turner's pedagogical approach during classroom discussions is to stay neutral, especially when the topic is concerning race. He believes that it is critical for the classroom teacher not to impose their own viewpoints on students and, as a result, I observed him interjecting his opinions on the topic of race only on rare occasions. Following this neutral pedagogical strategy, Mr. Turner deliberately refused to position himself on the continuum for fear of influencing student opinions.[17] Noticeably present throughout the dialogue were the two students at the opposing ends of the spectrum, a white male student, Nick, and a black male student, Richard. Neither student verbally offered his opinion, yet Mr. Turner, as well as the rest of the class, was anticipating their contributions. I observed many students glancing at both of them over the course of the discussion expecting some sort of conflict to occur. Nick and Richard have a history of clashing over their opposing ideas on race, and both students are strong-willed and

[17] I typically acted as a participant-observer in the classroom and sought to participate in most activities, but for the same reason I chose not to locate myself on the continuum.

opinionated. It was not until the conversation began to stall that Mr. Turner decided to ask Richard if he would like to share his opinion.

Richard was sitting in a stray desk located around the 2 area on the continuum. With an inflection of passion in his voice, he explained that although forms of racial progress have been achieved since the publication of *Native Son*, recent police shootings similar to Michael Brown are proof that not much has changed since this era. Mr. Turner, who was standing in the center of the horseshoe, paraphrased Richard's words and then paused to see if any student would volunteer to respond to Richard. When no student offered a response, Mr. Turner turned to face Nick, who was standing on the opposite end of the continuum around 8, and asked Nick for his opinion. Nick, with a shaky tinge in his voice, reluctantly stated that he believes much progress has been made and as a country we are close to achieving racial equality. Richard became visibly frustrated as Nick shared his opinion and he began shaking his head back and forth in opposition. Nick ended his response by saying:

> The people on the other end [of the continuum] are smarter at talking about this [race] so I guess since I am on this end I'm just not very smart.

The class observed Richard still shaking his head and Mr. Turner, noticing Richard's frustration, asked if he would like to respond. Richard expressed his frustration by stating:

> How could you say this when police are shooting black people?! How could we have possibly made this much progress?

Mr. Turner, who at this point is still standing in the middle of the horseshoe, decided to offer a verbal acknowledgement of Richard's response. He says:

> This is a very good point that Richard brings up and it seems to be in contrast to what you are saying, Nick, about racial progress. How do we as a country explain all of this violence, yet claim to have made so much progress?

As Mr. Turner spoke this statement, he walked from the middle of the horseshoe to stand about a foot away from Nick on the end of the continuum. Immediately, as Mr. Turner walked toward Nick, Richard put his head down on his desk and covered his face with his arms.

Mr. Turner, still standing next to Nick as he looked around at the class, noticed that Richard put his head down, and the rest of the class noticed too. The conversation halted after this occurred, and the intensity of the room seemed to be even tenser. The students fell silent. Mr. Turner asked if there are any more comments and no one responded. I noticed many students shaking their heads as if to indicate they do not want to talk anymore. So Mr. Turner proceeds to end the conversation by thanking students for engaging in this difficult discussion and indicating that there will be future conversations about the topic over the next couple of teaching units. With about 10 minutes remaining, the class moves on to an activity unrelated to race. Richard still has his head down on his desk and when class ends he does not leave as students file out of the room. Mr. Turner and I both approach him to see how he is feeling. He lifts his head off of the desk and with an agonizing look laments:

> I can't do this anymore. I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do. I was in the car for the Trayvon Martin verdict and I didn't know what to do. During Michael Brown and Eric Garner, those verdicts, I was in the car too. This keeps

> happening again and again, and again. I don't know what to do. I feel hopeless. (Fieldnotes, 2/23/15) [18]

Re-opening Racial Wounds

If psychoanalysis can tell us one thing, it is that the past does not always stay in the past. The context of the discussion, racial progress in the wake of present-day racial violence, constitutes an affective relational field where the national espousal of disarticulated racial grief rises to the surface. Melancholia's seething presence reveals our affective attachments to past histories of violence through the re-opening of the nation's racial wounds. Ruti (2005) explains:

> In the same way that nations and other collective entities owe their current shape to complex and at times highly conflicted histories, the lived present of each of us is traversed by a countless number of invisible threads that connect us to our pasts. (p. 638)

These interwoven threads connecting our racial pasts are largely invisible to us because our psyches find ways to repudiate the past on a conscious level, resulting in these disavowals being more aggressively reasserted in the unconscious (Ruti, 2005). However, the discussion brought the class face-to-face with grief that had been previously distorted and repressed and asked students to make sense of what has been lost by exposing the invisible threads attached to old racial wounds. The discussion embodies what it means to face those immaterial objects that haunt us through the transmission of affect, igniting past traumas that engulf the present—a melancholic affect. The "angling" of pedagogical

[18] The description of this entire section is taken from my fieldnotes on 2/23/15.

encounters underscores how race and trauma converge and emerge within the classroom as the discussion represents the class' exposure to the nation's infected racial wounds.

What is at stake here is much more than simply identifying oneself on a continuum since the discussion engages the very core of the nation's racial traumas. As a student aptly described during the discussion:

> I just think that we can't put ourselves even at a 5 because it starts with institutionalized racism and then it bleeds out into society and if you don't get rid of the source you can't address other problems. It is like a wound. You can clean the wound out, but it is still there. (Fieldnotes, 2/23/15)

The imagery of bleeding out and wounding is a suitable metaphor for racial injury. The tension in Nick and Richard's encounter certainly illuminates the apprehensive nature of the exchange and also points to a central conflict for the anti-racist pedagogue. The conundrum involves how one navigates a situation where there is a confrontation with the painful history of racial violence and how this confrontation often becomes a barrier to anti-racism. Cheng (2001) states, "It can be damaging to say how damaging racism has been. Yet it is surely equally harmful *not* to talk about this history of sorrow" (p. 14, italics in original). Our racial wounds persist even if we choose to ignore them. The anti-racist pedagogue must make the choice to address racial injury, but with this choice comes much pain and sorrow. The discussion that Mr. Turner wanted the class to engage in was an attempt to confront our racial traumas, but the clash between Nick and Richard disrupted further engagement as the affective dynamics of the encounter reinforced racial hegemonies. During the encounter, the pain of racial trauma was evident; however, the process of facing racial injury is a necessary component of anti-racism. A closer

examination of the encounter between Mr. Turner's pedagogy in relation to Nick and Richard's disagreement can provide valuable insights into how the opening of racial wounds produces melancholic affects that often disrupt anti-racist agency.

Affective Economies and the Rippling Effect of Emotion

The most crucial aspect of the exchange between Nick, Richard, and Mr. Turner was not so much what they were saying, but where their bodies were positioned in the classroom. The tipping point of this encounter is Mr. Turner's movement away from Richard in order to be closer to Nick, which prompted Richard's disengagement. Bundled within Mr. Turner's movements and Nick and Richard's reactions to those movements are the histories of their bodies—"the lived past of the body" bound up within the affective event (Massumi, 2015, p. 49). These histories encompass assemblages of both their past interactions (including the ways their bodies have existed previously within the classroom), but also interactions that pre-date the existence of their bodies. This pre-dated history refers to the racialization of the body or what Fanon (1967) identifies as a "historical-racial schema" which constitutes the racialized body as being woven "out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories" by whiteness (p. 95). Here the body has a predetermined objectification where one's skin color has already been contextualized through the prism of race. So there is a layering effect of histories for Nick, Richard, and Mr. Turner—the history of their marked racial bodies and their history of past interactions within classroom and school space that help formulate the affective register.

In order to grasp the intensity of the moment, Nick and Richard's history within the AVID/IB classroom needs to be further explored. For as long as I have known Nick

and Richard, ever since 9th grade, they often disagreed on topics related to race. Their polarizing perspectives made discussions edgier as they clashed over the reality of racism. Nick's viewpoints came to represent traditional white conservative values where racism is a relic of the past and everyone has an equal chance of succeeding in life as long as they work hard enough. Conversely, Richard's views reflected those of a staunch social activist; at his core lies a spirit for anti-racism and he very much strives to fight against racial injustice. Over the course of three years their frequent conflicts had a lightning rod effect in the classroom. Whenever race was a topic of study, Nick and Richard came to symbolize conductors of racial static that attracted the energy for the proverbial lightning strike. Ahmed's (2004a) theorization of affective economies contextualizes how the history of Nick and Richard's interactions became the catalyst for the intensification of affective space. Affective economies, as Ahmed (2004a) suggests, allow for emotions to accumulate much like capital accumulates in an economic sense. That is, emotions accumulate over time through "the movement between signs: the more signs circulate, the more affective they become" (Ahmed, 2004a, p.45). Much like how the circulation of commodities increase in magnitude over time, "the movement between signs or objects converts into affect" (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 45). Nick and Richard's frequent disagreements signify an accruement of affective value where the sign becomes the positioning of Nick and Richard at opposite ends of the continuum. The lightning rods and the object become the charge of emotionality during the encounter, the lightning strike. The undercurrent of racial static pervades the affective environment, with Nick at one end of the continuum and Richard at the other, symbolizing opposing poles of the ideological struggle for control of racial knowledge.

For Ahmed (2004a), the affective value of signs, subjects, and objects underscores what she calls the "rippling' effect of emotions" that involve a process of movement mediated by history (p. 44-45). The circulation of emotions moves both sideways between signs, subjects, and objects as well as backward and forward through the past and into the present. Within the context of Nick and Richard's conflict, feelings spread as a part of both the affective accumulation of their previous confrontations as well as through the re-opening of the nation's racial wounds. These "*feelings take us across different levels of signification, not all of which are admitted in the present*" (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 44, italics in original). Thus, the interaction between the intrasubjective and the intersubjective is at work here: the circulation of feelings is psycho-social in nature. These emotions are not contained within sign, subject, or object, but are instead only produced as a result of the relationality between Nick and Richard (that is, the linkages between signs, subjects, and objects) and the transmission of repressed racial trauma created through the pedagogy of Mr. Turner. Khanna (2003) asserts that the distressing return of the inassimilable lost object into psychic life produces an affective state as the lost object is unable to be mourned. The intrasubjective then refers to the psychic recurrence of past and present racial losses, while the intersubjective illuminates the racial dynamics of social encounters; both the "intra" (the psyche) and the "inter" (the social) merged to manifest melancholic affects during Nick and Richard's confrontation.

Whiteness as Technology of Affect

Having established that affective formations can accumulate value through the circulation of emotion, what ultimately are the effects of this accumulated value? The

emergence of affect and the production of feeling as a result of affective encounters is concomitantly imbued with structures of power which Hook (2005) identifies as "hegemonies of affect." Here my analysis turns toward a particular hegemonic construct: whiteness. Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) emphasize the reproduction of whiteness as intimately connected to emotional and bodily reactions. Their analysis maintains that the hegemony of whiteness is upheld in part through affective investments in white identities and through insidious patterns of operationalized emotions that aim to disrupt classroom racial dialogues, which they label as "technology of affect." Whiteness as technology of affect engages the Foucauldian (1977) term *technology*, which is defined as a set of techniques and practices used by individuals, either on themselves or on others, to accomplish certain objectives. Affective technologies pertain to the arrangement of affects and emotions within a given field of relations that are mobilized in ways that reify hegemonic constructs. Whiteness as technology of affect has implications for anti-racist praxis through the theorization of the methods whites use to preserve racial power dynamics within classroom spaces.

An explanation of the subtle reification of whiteness during Mr. Turner's encounter with Nick and Richard requires us to consider the emotional and bodily dimensions of affective technologies. Recalling Nick's response to positioning himself at the higher end of the continuum (close to achieving racial equity), he justified his placement by replying that he was simply "not smart enough" to discuss the topic. His appeal to ignorance is a stark example of an affective technique called "white intellectual alibi" (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013) that whites use to fend off allegations of racist behavior. Nick's white intellectual alibi was ironically to claim to be unintellectual,

which served as a ploy to avoid looking racist to the rest of the class for placing himself at the highest point on the continuum. There was a discursive element to his strategy where Nick accounted for his perceived racism by appearing incoherent, but the other side of the affective coin reveals the emotional subtext of his statement as crucial to the movement of Mr. Turner's body toward him during the interaction. Stemming from an understanding of Mr. Turner's willingness to remain neutral during race dialogues, Nick's emotional disposition pled for white empathy. Not only did Nick want to be seen as not smart enough, he wanted to be consoled for feeling this way; he was appealing to Mr. Turner's empathetic nature and banking on the fact that Mr. Turner had perhaps felt the same way as a white person at some point in his own life.

Helping Nick's case for empathy was Richard's angry response. Certainly Nick anticipated Richard acting as such; after all they had had plenty of past experience disagreeing with one another. This prompts Mr. Turner's next movements, which unveil the power of both whiteness and affective technologies in the classroom. Mr. Turner, who is by no means a novice racial pedagogue, has to make a split-second decision. He has two students, one white and the other black, who are in conflict over the reality of racism. His choice reflects the nuanced angling of the pedagogic encounter and the blending of bodies, emotions, and discourse within affective formations. Choosing to move his body to stand by Nick while verbally supporting Richard is a White intellectual alibi in its own right. This is where Mr. Turner's pedagogical strategy of neutrality works against his anti-racist efforts, since he literally and ideologically cannot be in two places at once. Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) affirm, "Affectively, within a white subject's self-understanding, he cannot be racist and anti-racist at the same time" (p. 156).

The formation of Mr. Turner's white racial alibi takes place on two fronts. The first involves his own psychic management through his attempt to support both viewpoints: his verbal support for anti-racism and his bodily support for racism. Within this contradictory space the alibi serves an emotional purpose: "It allows white subjects to establish stability in the face of destabilizing situations, such as critical race dialogue" (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013, p. 156). The second comprises the literal matter of being unable to stand in two places at once, stressing the power of the corporeal in light of Mr. Turner's verbal support for Richard. In this instance, Mr. Turner's movement toward Nick represents both a social shielding (Mr. Turner and Nick's bodies are protecting each other from the discomforting trauma of racial dialogue by virtue of standing next to one other), as well as a psychic shielding (Mr. Turner's corporeal association with Nick provides the white empathy that Nick's previous alibi desired, but also Mr. Turner enables a certain level of comfort for himself by creating a sense of equilibrium during a particularly turbulent moment.) This movement ultimately secured a preservation of white safety for both of them. Indeed, it is illustrative that Hook (2005) refers to the affective resonance of whiteness as a "force-field of attachments" (p. 82). Nick's original white intellectual alibi thus sets off a chain of affects that ultimately curtails the discussion and effectively (and affectively) reproduces whiteness.

After the discussion, Mr. Turner expressed his frustration concerning his facilitation of the encounter. He deeply regretted not silencing Nick more explicitly and in retrospect had a self-awareness about his movement toward Nick as causing Richard to put his head on the desk. Within his split-second decision to move closer to Nick, what forces compelled Mr. Turner to act in such a way? Hindsight is 20/20 for Mr. Turner, as

he would have never made this decision knowing the consequences of his actions, but focusing on the micropolitics of the pedagogical encounter it is important to consider the question posed by Spillers (1996): "It would be useful to know, though, in general, how bodies respond to bodies not like their own, and what it is that 'sees'—in other words, do we look with eyes, or with the psyche?" (p. 79). It is sufficient to say that Mr. Turner's pedagogical choice was not *consciously* motivated by the affective pull of whiteness, so the answer to the aforementioned question must indeed be that in this instance Mr. Turner was "seeing" with his psyche. The one difference was that the shuttling of Mr. Turner's body had more to do with the body's skin color that resembled his own rather than the body's skin color that did not. Herein lies the essence of race and affect: the body's (in)ability to enter into relations with other bodies. Even for this brief instance affect "provides the invitational opening for a rationality to get its hooks into the flesh" (Massumi, 2015, p. 85). The hegemonic hooks of whiteness pull the puppet strings that coerce Mr. Turner to stand next to Nick thereby symbolizing an explicit form of white solidarity in Richard's eyes, prompting him to disengage from the discussion.

The significance of these racialized affects have dire consequences for Richard's well-being. Richard's reaction to the movement of Mr. Turner's body illustrates the sinister repercussions of white intellectual alibis. Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) describe this impact as such:

> Whereas whites have the ability to put themselves in harm's way within the anti-racist project, minorities rarely have the power to voluntarily choose to experience discursive violence. People of color have no recourse for an alibi. They are guilty bodies. (p.157)

In the process of Mr. Turner's shielding of Nick, the discursive violence, and I would also add, the psychic violence, was absorbed by Richard. Richard reiterated these sentiments when he later clarified why he was angry:

> He [Mr. Turner] was understanding what I was saying but he kind of still sided with Nick's point of view even though he personally didn't feel that way. He wanted Nick to feel comfortable in expressing his viewpoints even though they were sort of dumb. He [Nick] made stupid viewpoints, so that angered me.

Richard also added another reason for his anger:

> I was fed up with Nick and his bullshit. (Interview, 4/22/15)

Let us not forget the melancholic connection to the micropolitics of the incident; the intensity of Richard's anger is due to the high-stakes nature of the dialogue. For Richard, this discussion served as a means for validating that the racial violence he sees around him is a threat to all of humanity. What mattered most to Richard was not where Nick placed himself on the continuum (I'm sure he suspected beforehand that Nick would be high on the scale), but that Mr. Turner would make the choice (even if it was unconscious) to refuse to minimize Richard's anti-racist standpoint by not making Nick feel comfortable. Richard needed Mr. Turner to put himself "in harm's way." A necessary part of critical conversations concerning race is confronting the unsettling and painful realization of racism. Yet, these confrontations are also when we are the most melancholic and the most vulnerable relative to the traumas that haunt us. Not only was Mr. Turner "seeing" through his psyche, but so were Nick and Richard. This form of "seeing" was not optical, but rather was the process of deciphering their unconscious traumas and working to come to grips with their racial grief.

Therefore, in the context of affective strategies, white racial alibis serve a psycho-social purpose within the melancholic landscape. When the affective environment became the most melancholic, Nick and Mr. Turner each used alibis to escape the uncomfortable conscious presence of melancholy, which enabled a certain degree of psychic comfort in the face of suffering. However, the social aspect of this psycho-social encounter is a result of Nick and Mr. Turner needing each other to ensure the validity of their white alibis. Therefore the only guilty body in this incident was Richard, who never could obtain an alibi in the first place.

Conclusion: Affect is a Synonym for Hope

To what extent should Mr. Turner's attempt at discussing race in the classroom be considered unsuccessful? Mr. Turner's own assessment of the lesson was that it failed to advance the conversation concerning more current racial issues and he greatly attributed the encounter with Nick and Richard as the main reason for which the dialogue was ineffective. And my analysis of their interaction seems to back-up his claims since affective technologies of whiteness disrupted the dialogue. However, if we take a closer look at the affective politics of classroom interactions, the perceived failure of the lesson may not be so apparent. Theorizing the relationship between affect and ideology is useful in understanding how power operates within the realm of the classroom. The dimensions of affect constitute a pre-ideological event where affects take shape *before* we are inculcated by ideology. Massumi (2015) further explains:

> To be in effect, ideological predeterminations have to enter the event and *take* effect. They have to reassert themselves to make themselves effectively ingredient

> to the event. Their effectiveness is always an accomplishment, a renewed victory, and what needs to be accomplished can fail. (p. 58, italics in original)

What Massumi's assertion tells us is in the context of affective politics there is always the potential that ideology will fail to indoctrinate us and reassert its control. In classroom space, these affective events are plentiful, but the manner in which ideology interpellates us often renders affective formations imperceptible. Similar to Bourdieu's (1977) conception of *habitus*, we are duped into unconsciously repeating the script that ideology has written for us, often in ways that ensure our own dominance. The potential for affect as a tool for the anti-racist pedagogue lies in its ability to find the cracks in ideology's armor. The critical educator must determine, in any given affective event, where are there openings for the power of ideology to be usurped? Lim (2010) summarizes this potentiality with his description of the relational field:

> The range of things that might potentially be done, felt, or perceived is continually modified by what actually happens between all the different bodies on the field…It is because of this multiplicity and this constant modification that the virtual or potential field of affect guarantees an openness to difference and thus the momentum for change. (p. 2398)

Since affect guarantees a degree of openness for every situation, Massumi (2015) refers to affect as synonymous with hope. An understanding of affective politics emphasizes that the body is not fully predetermined to follow an ideological script. As a result there is always the potential for actions that break the chains of hegemony.

The anti-racist pedagogical alteration that perhaps should have been made during the encounter between Nick, Richard, and Mr. Turner was for Mr. Turner to either stay in

place or move closer to Richard. In this singular encounter, Mr. Turner was unable to disrupt the hegemonic construction of whiteness as a result of his movement toward Nick. However, before we call this interaction a failure, we must consider that affects do not take place as singularities. There is a continual emergence of affects at any given pedagogical point in time. In other words, this interaction will not be the last opportunity Mr. Turner will have to make pedagogical alterations. What was most instructive for Mr. Turner was what he learned as a result of this pedagogical misstep. Sometime after the class period, Mr. Turner and I talked extensively about his thought process during the incident. He walked around the empty classroom and replayed the event:

> I remember walking away from this corner [standing in Richard's corner] and going to stand in this kind of like neutral territory over here [walks to the middle of the horseshoe]. And then as I walked over to Nick, I turned and Richard's head went down. Like it was this physical moment.

Mr. Turner then discussed with me the realization that he made a mistake by walking to stand by Nick:

> I watched Richard put his head down and I was like, *oh my god, what did I do?* And at what cost was I willing to do that? And that was my big feeling of depression; I feel like to preserve Nick, I destroyed Richard.

When determining whether the incident should be considered ineffective, we need to also consider the rigorous self-reflection that Mr. Turner engaged in after the event in question. His final comment to me about the incident was this:

> I know my words are important during these conversations [about race], but now I realize how important my body is too. This idea of the power of my body is now

> something I am always going to be aware of in the future when we have these types of conversations. (Interview, 6/9/15)

Although the incident became a reproduction of whiteness, I would not necessarily qualify the encounter as hopeless. In light of the insights that Mr. Turner gained from the interaction, it can be classified as an alter-accomplishment insofar as it primed the potential for future alter-accomplishments. For Mr. Turner, the interaction "[amplified] a previously unfelt potential to the point of perceptibility" (Massumi, 2015, p. 58). It became the momentum for future change in that Mr. Turner now has the potential to be aware of his body in relation to his words during critical race dialogues. The learning resulting from this interaction gives Mr. Turner the capacity to adapt and redeploy his pedagogy when faced with similar interactions. There is now a space available in his pedagogical repertoire to make a habitual leap toward comprehending the importance of the corporeal; the memory of this pedagogical encounter enables Mr. Turner the possibility to enhance his recognition of bodily positioning in the classroom. He is now conscious of the power of his affective presence in classroom space.

Despite what Mr. Turner learned after the incident there is still the question of "at what cost" with regard to Richard's melancholic reaction to the encounter. In Mr. Turner's words he "destroyed" Richard while "preserving" Nick. These dynamics are characteristic of race dialogues that reinscribe whiteness as students of color bear the burden of the provocation of racial trauma. Richard's feelings of hopelessness developed as a result of a layering of losses caused by the melancholic psyche: "The racially melancholic minority is doubly versed in the art of losing. The racially denigrated person has to forfeit the full security of his/her imaginary integrity…but is then forced to take

in…and reidentify with that loss: a double loss" (Cheng, 2001, p. 175). In this instance, Richard's double loss is layered with the insecurity of his own integrity caused by Mr. Turner's bodily movement toward Nick as well as Richard's reidentification with the conscious racial injury that comprises the melancholic nation as a result of this movement. In the moment this may have left Richard psychically destroyed (and conversely Nick was psychically preserved), but hope is not lost because later Mr. Turner was able to apologize to Richard and express his regret for not more explicitly defending his viewpoint (Fieldnotes, 2/24/15).

The implications for classroom practice that can be gleaned from Nick, Richard, and Mr. Turner's interaction are that confronting violence is a necessary aspect of discussing race in the classroom (Leonardo & Porter, 2010), but being willing to continuously learn from these confrontations is also necessary for the pedagogue to improve his or her ability to teach about traumatic subjects. In order for Mr. Turner to learn from his mistake, he had to have the courage to design curriculum that uncovered the nation's racial injuries in order to even be in the position to make this mistake in the first place. Anti-racist pedagogy must include these types of conflicts. However, the unconscious is sometimes an unpredictable entity and the pull of whiteness is strong. To say that Mr. Turner learned from this interaction is tenuous considering that he may unconsciously make the same pedagogical error when faced with a similar decision in the future, since we see the most clearly through our psyches when we are the most melancholic. Instead, Mr. Turner must learn through repetition; after all whiteness cannot be abolished overnight. This requires that pedagogues repeatedly put themselves in situations where they are meeting racial trauma as a means of understanding the nuances

and intricacies of affective formations of whiteness and the emotions that are produced as a result. Still, simply meeting trauma cannot be enough, as Mr. Turner was only able to understand through a process of self-reflection, via the conversations he had about the incident with both myself and Richard. This form of learning resembles Boler's (1999) conception of a *pedagogy of discomfort*, defined as "both an invitation to inquiry as well as a call to action" (p. 176). A pedagogy of discomfort seeks to highlight what can be gained from the repetitious commitment to traumatic learning. Mr. Turner not only sought to engage in this racial dialogue as a form of collective action, but he participated in critical inquiry through his conversations with me and with Richard. This type of pedagogical process is necessary when considering that alter-accomplishments need to be *primed*. The priming involves the hard work of finding the crucial pedagogical angles that produce social change.

Chapter 5

White Racial Melancholia: Ambivalent and Shameful Identities

During those discussions [conversations surrounding Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Black Lives Matter] *it was really tension-filled because it was such a sensitive subject for people. And when you hear your classmates say, "Oh my God, I'm scared to go outside, I'm scared to do that." It kind of makes you feel like my race did that; it's like shameful almost. You don't know what to say.* Susan, 12th grade AVID/IB student (Interview, 2/25/15)

Introduction

The white mind[19] is complex. It is an atmosphere created by the weight of history and the blemishes of death; it is shaped through loss, molded by race, and carved out of trauma. Perhaps the adolescent white mind is even more intricate, considering the contours are still being developed as youth learn to make sense of the world around them. For example, Susan, a white student struggling to understand the increase of public displays of police violence and its impact on the black community, felt a sense of shame when hearing her black classmates express anger over the murders of Michael Brown and Eric Garner. As depicted in the previous chapter with Nick and Richard's encounter, these discussions were often contentious. Similarly, many white students in the AVID/IB class grappled with a range of difficulties when attempting to learn about race over the

[19] I am using the word "mind" intentionally here as I am guided by Professor Casarino's distinction between the mind and the brain. To paraphrase, neuroscientists can tell us about how the brain works, but they can tell us nothing about the mind.

course of the school year. While some of these students were more receptive to learning about race than others, all of them experienced resistance to addressing the realities of racism in America. This chapter develops a theory of white racial melancholia through an exploration of the white psyche for the purposes of examining how and why white students resist learning about race in the classroom.

White racial melancholia is a critical tool to decipher the complexities of the white psyche. It enables a theorization of the social and historical contexts of racialization without omitting the psychoanalytic basis of trauma engendered through the development of white subjectivity. Often absent from anti-racist discourse and research on whiteness in education is the crucial formation of white subjectivity and its relationship to the proclivity of whites to disavow participating in the struggle for racial justice. Layton (2006) suggests that social processes such as racialization are at the heart of subjectivity and subjective trauma, but she also believes subjectivity is marked by unconscious processes that can be decoded through psychoanalytic interpretations. Exploring the white unconscious is central to understanding the neurotic behaviors that whites often exhibit during conversations about race. The critical rub is that these behaviors are not accidental or coincidental, but are in effect the fundamental source of white resistance to learning about race and a significant obstacle to the development of an anti-racist worldview.

Mills (1997) identifies a core tenet of the solidification of whiteness as the naturalization of neurotic behaviors when white people are faced with the prospects of discerning information regarding the deployment of racism. A key condition laid out

through the terms of Mills' racial contract theory[20] requires the signatories to cultivate a cognitive model designed to display utter confusion surrounding the subject of race. Mills (1997) states the full condition as such:

> *Thus in effect, on matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made*. (p. 18, italics in original)

What this tenet of white racialization tells us is that whites are invested in *not* learning about race; indeed this preoccupation becomes a possessive investment (Lipsitz, 2006). Teaching white students about race must then involve finding methods for whites to disinvest from their investment in racial ignorance. The contract also tells us that there is a psycho-social function to this cognitive impairment. There are traumatic circumstances leading to this impairment considering that one signs the racial contract unwillingly and without consent. The trauma originates from being forced to sign without even knowing the terms and conditions of what one is signing and then being forced to abide by the contract or face punishment. There are both psychic and social dynamics to this traumatic process which help to construct white subjectivity. This chapter serves to make connections among the psycho-social aspects of white racialization, trauma, and the struggle to learn about racism through the lens of melancholia.

[20] The basis of the racial contract is that the creation and maintenance of white supremacy rests on whites upholding the terms and conditions of said contract.

A theory of white racial melancholia emphasizes how the system of white supremacy has sculpted the landscape of the white subject. There has been much research detecting and exploring the effects of neurotic white behaviors in the context of discussing race (see for example Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Frankenberg, 1993; & Pollock, 2004), but what often goes undertheorized are the intersecting, interlocking, and overlapping psycho-social causes of these behaviors. McWhorter (2005) criticizes the tendency for whiteness studies to focus on the effects of whiteness such as various theories of white privilege, which she labels as "economic metaphors of possession and distribution," while ignoring the "political production of racial subjects" that ultimately undermines whiteness studies' agenda for "dethroning white subjectivity" (p. 544). With this criticism in mind, I use melancholia as a bridge connecting the causes of white racialization to the effects[21] of whiteness to construct a theory of white subjectification that illuminates methods for properly addressing white neurosis and inaction in relation to racial injustice. The chapter first elucidates the concept of white racial melancholia by tracing the historical, social, and psychoanalytic aspects of white subjectivity. Then, through several examples highlighting the struggles of white students in the AVID/IB class, I analyze how whiteness, melancholia, and trauma influence learning. I end with a discussion of curricular and pedagogical approaches for addressing white forms of racial trauma in the context of learning about race in the classroom.

White Racial Melancholia

Historical and Social Origins of White Racial Melancholia

[21] These effects include various neurotic behaviors exhibited by whites when discussing race.

Roediger (1994) concluded that whiteness is *nothing but* false and oppressive and the sociohistorical production of whiteness is instilled through psychic trauma. The white subject is woven out of violence through what Roediger (1991) identifies as a systematic development of a sense of whiteness through an elaborate structure of punishment and reward. This punishment refers to material and psychological abuse endured by those who refuse to join the ranks of their white brethren. Conversely, investing in whiteness is rewarded through such endorsements as employment opportunities, job security, better living conditions etc., though perhaps the most enticing reward is that one can be considered human under the guise of the nation-state. For instance, a stark example of this system of punishment and reward involved poor white Southern workers in the 1830s being increasingly threatened with the term "white slavery" which further encouraged their desire to become less like blacks (as to distance themselves from slavery) and more like the white slave owners who dehumanized and oppressed blacks (Roediger, 1991). Although the desire to become white was largely motivated by economic stratification, Dubois (1995) rightly observes there are significant psychological "wages" that whites garner in the process of becoming white. It is essential to note that these economic, social, and psychological advantages were obtained through violence. That is, many lives have perished, both white and non-white, through the creation of white supremacy as an oppressive system and the forging of white subjectivity as a dominant mode of racial identification.

The historical formation of whiteness, beginning in the 17th century until the present day, requires generations of white people to be inculcated into the system of white supremacy. Since the inception of this oppressive system, the social bonds of

whiteness have strengthened to the point where becoming white is a normative state of being. White people are often mystified by the meaning of whiteness in the context of their racial lexicon. The meaning of race for most white people does not include whiteness itself, but instead denotes anyone who is non-white. Thus, whiteness becomes an unmarked category or what Thandeka (1999) identifies as the "great unsaid" (p. 3). The normativity of whiteness is very much connected to how the U.S. nation-state functions to oppress communities of color—through the establishment of white identity as synonymous with being American. The hegemony of white subjectification as the process of becoming American begins at birth. Similar to the methods in which gender becomes normalized and hierarchical, race becomes defined even before the white baby is born because the white parents already know the race of the baby (Martinot, 2010). Also much like gender, this process has biological undertones through the misunderstanding of race as being naturalized by racial ideologies related to eugenics concepts. Martinot (2010) further describes the birthing of whiteness:

> It does not matter who we are, or what we think about race, or racism, or white supremacy; we do this to the baby. It is not thought of in terms of performance of the role the baby will be given to play or a role we are playing. It is simply another uniform. (p. 12)

Membership into whiteness becomes one's birthright; however, whiteness simultaneously becomes an afterthought. The new baby's attachments to a well-fabricated oppressive identity is simply the norm: "American means white" (Morrison, 1992, p. 47). This process of indoctrination is not yet a conscious part of the white baby's existence; nonetheless, the baby has gained acceptance into an exclusive club thereby claiming all

of the rewards and advantages of membership. The process occurs unimpeded and without interruption, leading Martinot (2010) to describe the production of white identity as a well-oiled machine churning out white subjects at a flawless rate. The machinery of whiteness is "well-oiled" due to the history of racial violence and the psychological advantages whites have accumulated over centuries. These sociohistorical formations of whiteness mark the unconscious origins of the white subject's melancholic relationship with race.

Racial Abuse and the White Child

The marking of the baby as white initiates its unconscious membership into whiteness, which follows the baby into childhood where they eventually become conscious of the existence of a non-white racial other. The nexus of melancholic trauma occurs through the subsequent conflict that arises between the unconscious repression of the oppressive nature of one's white identity with the conscious desire to deny that one is complicit in the system of white supremacy. However, the enactment of this psychic trauma only transpires through an active social process, indicating the psycho-social production of the white subject. Individual discoveries of race often take place in childhood and are often accompanied by some sort of abuse from the white community in response to these discoveries. Thandeka's (1999) enlightening study documenting the various ways in which white children are castigated by their parents or other members of the white community for attempting to interact with and befriend black children illuminates the white child's traumatic induction into whiteness. What Thandeka (1999) describes as "white racial abuse" usually occurs at the point where the white child is

beginning to come into contact with the non-white other. The child, not yet aware of the rules and regulations of whiteness, have no qualms about interacting humanely with the non-white other. Having unknowingly broken a regulated white boundary, the child is subsequently reprimanded for crossing into the "non-white zone" and as a result the child learns that by crossing into this zone they will be punished (Thandeka, 1999).

The formation of trauma in the context of the melancholic white child is induced by the ubiquitous presence of the fear of being disloyal to the white community. The white child is forcefully socialized into this fear-stricken environment because the child learns that infidelity to whiteness means the threat of white abandonment. Thandeka (1999) further explains this process: "The child learns to silence and then deny its own resonant feelings toward racially proscribed others, not because it chooses to become white, but because it wishes to remain within the community that is quite literally its life" (p. 24). There is a psycho-social glue that binds the white subject to other white subjects through this shared fear of being exiled from the white community and forfeiting the benefits of being a member of this community. Thandeka (1999) characterizes three overlapping areas of white self-definition at the threshold of one's infringement upon non-white zones: *objective, subjective,* and *interpersonal*. The *objective* region is comprised of the location where contact with the non-white other can be made. Then, *subjectively*, "it is the point of contact within the self where forbidden desires are felt and denied" (Thandeka, 1999, p. 26). And finally, *interpersonal* refers to the punishment that teaches the white subject to suppress their forbidden feelings and desires at the point of encroachment. The intersection of these three regions defines the psycho-social internalization of white norms in relation to the external white world. Here, the white

child learns the rules of racialization by an ongoing psycho-social process that solidifies their participation in a dehumanizing system.

There is an insidious quality that preserves the cohesive white community in relation to the innocence of the white child. This is due to the fact that white children's instincts are to love openly and freely without racial distinctions; they desire to make friends and connect with all people. However, loving all people runs counter to the core values of whiteness. Therefore the child learns to repress these desires by the force of white authority figures who have themselves gone through this same process as they passed through childhood. This devious cycle of white racial abuse is nebulously deployed through family, friends, teachers, police officers, laws, and policies. That is, there is not a definitive process that predicts how or by whom the child will be reprimanded for their racial transgressions. These white racial assaults can be explicit and harsh or implicit and subtle. They can come from someone the child has known and loved their whole life, or from someone they do not even know, or even from a written guideline. The child succumbs to this pervasive sense of fear as a means of protection from these nefarious assaults, and through this submission the child's white racial identity is created.

The Source of White Racial Melancholia: Ambivalence and Shame

The individual white subject is formed beginning at birth with an unconscious social placement within a nurturing white family. Race is not an issue for them until childhood racial discoveries bring forth a conscious recognition of racial differences. It is not until this point in the white subject's existence that white racial melancholia becomes

an integral part of psycho-social life. The *source* of white racial melancholia is the ongoing conflict between the desire to reach out beyond the white community and the fear that emerges when these desires arise. Establishing this conflict as the core of white subjectivity allows us to theorize the ways in which the white psyche's melancholic state gives rise to all sorts of mechanisms that prevent whites from learning about and dismantling the very world they created. Citing both Lott (1993) and Rogin's (1996) historical research on the social and psychological function of blackface minstrelsy in America, Cheng (2001) identifies the occurrence of white racial melancholia through the "imbricated but denied relationship" that whites have with non-whites (p. 12). She further explains, "The dominant culture's relation to the raced other displays an entangled network of repulsion and sympathy, fear and desire, repudiation and identification" (Cheng, 2001, p. 12). The entangling of these polarizing feelings represents the white subject's melancholic trauma that is forged through the systematic exclusion of the racial other. Singleton (2009) characterizes the sorrow produced within white subjects "as a sort of troubled collective bereavement or an inability to come to terms with its own ideological construction" (p. 187). This bereavement is built on the maintenance of social loss through the obfuscation of the formation of whiteness itself, which generates a psycho-social "splitting" of the white subject.

The "splitting" that takes place creates a white identity that is torn between the brutality of whiteness and the ideal of social justice. In the midst of the rewards earned for becoming white there is simultaneously a tradeoff that occurs through the required dehumanization of non-whites that becoming white requires. This concession establishes white racial identity as deeply conflicted. Lensmire's (2010, 2011, 2014) work on white

racial identity underscores the ambivalence produced from one's allegiance to whiteness through his analysis of Ellison's (1964) writing on the function of white people creating stereotypes to dehumanize people of color. Lensmire (2010) posits, "What if, as Ellison argued, there are not only vile stereotypes and assumptions of white supremacy inside us as white people, but also sincere desires to act ethically and to be a part of a just society?" (p. 169). This inner conflict is at the center of white subject formation and characterizes white racialization as a wholly melancholic process.

The melancholic white subject faces a persistent dilemma through the constant psychic negotiation of their ambivalent desires. The system of white supremacy forces white people to walk a psychological tightrope where they must balance "a belief in and desire for equality in America, poised against the evidence, all around, of massive inequality" (Lensmire & Snaza, 2010, p. 419). This binary provides the catalyst for an intrasubjective battle where forbidden desires are suppressed and denied. Thandeka (1999) insightfully labels the feelings that emerge from white ambivalence as "white shame." These emotions function as a "psychological guard" for white people who encroach upon non-white zones where shame acts as a "final defense mechanism" to hide feelings toward racial others that the white community has deemed impermissible (Thandeka, 1999, p. 27). Thandeka (1999) writes:

> When a forbidden feeling manages a furtive escape and comes to the fore as race-mixing or rage toward one's own white community, white shame and fear strong-arm it back into place by deadening feeling and extinguishing desire anew. The success of the strategy renders the original injury invisible. (p. 27)

Although Thandeka does not specifically characterize white shame as a form of melancholia, from her description it is clear that these feelings are melancholic responses to racism. The white subject learns to mask yearnings for a humanizing existence that express themselves through shame. This shame is disconnected from the original source of the subject's traumatic condition shaped by the white racial abuse one endures beginning in childhood. White ambivalence and the shame produced from this split identity make for a convoluted psycho-social self-understanding of racialization. Abuse from the white community teaches the white subject a disarticulated manner of grieving by distorting what it means to be human. This, in turn, constructs a severe resistance to learning about race for white subjects as shame wells up inside of them and traumatic, painful feelings rise to the surface.

White Student Resistance to Learning: Engaging Melancholia, Trauma, and Race

White Adolescent Neurosis and Confrontations with the Racial Other

When Susan expresses feelings of shame, as the quotation at the beginning of this chapter indicates, she invokes repressed emotions that have been defined for her since birth. These shameful feelings concerning her race are unlocked in a space where white students confront racism in the same classroom as students of color. The AVID/IB classroom effectively served to enable white students to cross-over into non-white zones by requiring these students to engage in cross-racial dialogues concerning the reality of racism in America. However, stepping into these zones did not shield students from white racial abuse inflicted upon them by the surrounding white community. In fact, a major impediment disabling white students from learning about race and striving for racial

justice were conflicts that students dealt with outside of the classroom. These outside conflicts did not take away from the internal classroom difficulties experienced by students or even their internal psychic struggles. Instead, past and present white racial abuse that white students endured outside of the classroom significantly contributed to their resistance to confronting racial truths inside the AVID/IB class, despite their entrance into non-white zones. For instance, many white students discussed various circumstances where they were antagonized by family and friends about racial issues that they were learning about in class. These clashes resulted in ongoing struggles to accept racial knowledge that opposed white values since the consequences of this acceptance would amount to betrayal of one's white community.

The white students in the AVID/IB class were at a crucial stage of their own identity development as adolescents navigating a world where whiteness as a socializing system of dominance had a hegemonic strangle-hold on their conception of reality. As students wrestled with new racial knowledge that challenged the façade of an innocent white identity, they must unlearn the process of racialization that had been cast upon them by the white community. However, with every move to break free of this strangle-hold there are countermoves made by whiteness to force them back into place. Adolescence is a key stage in the fortification of white identity in the lives of this class of 12th grade students. They were on the brink of gaining a certain amount of independence as they left their parents and went to college. Consequently, they were also attempting to make sense of the world outside of their household, neighborhood, and school as they looked forward to adulthood. Their entrance into non-white zones, coupled with the opportunity to engage in discussions concerning racism, created opportunities for

students to weaken whiteness' grip. "The great unsaid" is not so silent anymore for white students who were not only in a classroom space that engaged in conversations about past and present racial violence in America but who also witnessed the expressions of pain and sorrow displayed by the students of color participating in these dialogues. The AVID/IB classroom disrupted Dyer's (1997) idea that "for most of the time white people speak about nothing but white people, it's just that we couch it in terms of 'people' in general" (p. 3). Mr. Turner recognized how important these opportunities can be for white students in the class as they struggle to confront racism in America. He said to me after a class discussion about race and the novel *Native Son* (1940):

> I got to get to them now. It's so important. They got to learn this stuff before they go off to college. We have to hit them now. (Fieldnotes, 2/23/15)

There was a tone of desperation in his voice because he understood the urgency of teaching students about race before it was out of his control. Depending on their field of study in college, they may never have critical race conversations in a classroom again.

When whiteness is at its most vulnerable and the truth of its deception is on the verge of being realized, it once again tightens its grip on reality. The strength of whiteness lies in its ability to discipline the white subject whenever its sinister fallacy is exposed. Learning about race triggers a psychic response from the white subject because the terms of the racial contract have been violated: white people must not confront the truth of their oppressive identity; they must stay ignorant. The melancholically induced trauma that is manifested through this violation becomes visible through neurotic behaviors. Matias and Allen (2013) posit that these behaviors arise through the threat of white abandonment. They explain:

> Facing what they believe to be an unbearable condition, that is, to be without the white "race" and thus alone and racially vulnerable, whites exhibit neurotic behavior when their contradictions are exposed. Living the lie of whiteness, they become angry, defensive, and agitated when the reality of their racial practice is shown to be incongruent with their racial idealism. (p. 299)

White students inside the AVID/IB class, as well as their white family members and friends outside of the classroom, exhibited various neurotic behavioral responses to learning and discussing race. These responses emerged through the psycho-social intersections of childhood racial trauma, the omnipresent threat of white racial abuse, and the internalization of white shame that all converged to establish white subjectivity. Identifying and analyzing these behaviors is important when attempting to understand a view of subjectivity that accounts for social and historical contexts of white racialization, which require us to consider the ways in which "we are always internally and externally imbricated with others" (Layton, 2006, p. 66). Further, if we are to deconstruct the intricacies of white subjectivity, we must also theorize how the internal and the external become conflated to produce "relational trauma" (Layton, 2006) that makes learning about race a difficult endeavor for white people who adhere to the epistemological ignorance required by the terms of the racial contract.

The examples that follow illustrate the reification of white hegemony in the lives of white students in the AVID/IB class who were waging a psycho-social battle with themselves and the community around them as they negotiated an existence predicated on the subjugation of others. With each revelation of the treachery of whiteness through the acquisition of new racial knowledge, the combat intensified in the conflict for the

development of white student anti-racism. My analysis of this struggle does not claim to fully understand the individual idiosyncrasies of one's subjectivity; however, through a psycho-social theorization of white racialization, we can better make sense of the methods by which whiteness seeks to dominate those that dare question its purity.

Denise: White Ambivalence and Normative Unconscious Processes

Denise, a white female student, was ambitious, outgoing, and friendly. She had several positive relationships with her fellow AVID/IB classmates, as many students were drawn to her because of her welcoming smile and dry sense of humor. I first met Denise when she was a student in my AVID English 10th grade course. In my class she exhibited a strong interest in learning about inequalities and this interest was no different in Mr. Turner's classroom. Her awareness of race at Sumner High School was apparent as she explained that she witnessed racism every day at school through how students talk about various segregated locations in the hallways. As she described:

> The blue lockers are known as the "black hole" and people say they don't like walking through it because it is the black hole and it is stinky and the people in there [mostly black students] are rude. (Interview, 2/19/15)

During our interview we discussed her thoughts concerning the role race plays in her life at Sumner. She continued to comment on behavior in the hallways after I asked her if students were talking about the murder of Michael Brown at school:

> D: No, but then again my closest friends are all white, middle-class people. And it is not that I have anything against, I guess—I don't know—that sounded really bad [Denise pauses here as she glances at the floor with a distraught look on her

face]. It is just like I don't know, I am a pretty outgoing person. I will talk to anybody that talks to me—it is not like I am just going to shun you because you are black. I am not going to do that. But I guess the people that I associate with on my own time, during passing time [free time in between classes] is basically like those four white people.

JG: Do you feel guilty about that?

D: Now that I said it, yeah.

JG: Why?

D: I don't know. That is like one of those things that I say and I don't mean to offend anybody or make it a problem, but it could be taken as a problem. Like somebody could be like how are you not racist.

JG: Could you have an all-white friend inner circle and still not be racist?

D: I think so, yeah. Because me and my friends are not racist. Oh God [Denise begins shaking her head uncomfortably as she hesitates to speak] I mean there is instances that like, I mean as a whole we are not racist.

JG: But there are instances? So we talked about microaggressions in class. Are there instances where microaggressions come out?

D: Yeah.

JG: What do you do about that? Like let's say one of your good friends, he or she is white, and they say something, a racial microaggression. What is your reaction to that?

D: I think at times I laugh it off and brush it off because again, I don't see it as a big deal. I am not faced with that problem. So I feel like, I think I might have said

this in class, racism to me as a person is like a backburner problem. It is not really my problem because I am not faced with it. But I feel like me saying that could be an eye-opener. Like maybe I could bring it to the front burner and do more stuff about it.

It was clear to me during our conversation that Denise was experiencing an internal conflict through her discovery that she may be perceived as racist due to all her close friends being white. Then, as if struggling to regain her balance as she navigates across a tightrope, she asserts that she and her friends are not racist. But once again her balance falters as she realizes that her friend group makes racially insensitive comments and her reaction is to just laugh it off. The back and forth continues with her admission that racism is a "back-burner problem" and then her next contemplation that she could put racism on the "front-burner." The conversation culminated with one last transition from Denise's hopeful statement of anti-racism to her explanation of the way she is actually a victim of reverse racism through the methods by which a competitive research university she recently applied to chooses black students over white students:

D: But I mean, I kind of am faced with it applying for colleges and stuff this year. I have a seen a lot like with Middleton University [pseudonym] to be honest. I heard a lot about that. So I mean I guess I am kind of faced with it, but for me as a white person there are so many other [college] options.

JG: What did you hear about Middleton?

D: That because I am not an outstanding student, but I am a pretty good student, I really don't get bad grades. But I feel like I am an average student and I feel like if they looked at me as an average student and let's say another black female as an

> average student, that they would take the black person over the white person because they want diversity. That is a big thing at Middleton, just like touring the campus and stuff. They have a diverse community. But I didn't feel as if Middleton was doing anything to make racism go away. Yeah, they are diverse and stuff, but you see the same race kind of hanging out with the same race. When I toured I saw the same race with the same race. (Interview, 2/19/15)

Denise's comments illustrate Lensmire's (2010) conception of white ambivalence enacted through the tension created between, on the one hand, Denise's acceptance of her friends' racist actions and her unwillingness to admit her own racism, and on the other hand, her acknowledgement that she could possibly be anti-racist by putting the topic on "the front-burner." Here we see Denise attempt to navigate competing desires as she tries to conceal the guilt regarding her racist feelings. During the conversation she "catches" herself several times when confronting her own racial biases, quickly justifying her innocence and claiming that she is not racist. The disciplinary power of whiteness was on full display during the interview, especially at the critical moment when the forbidden desire to explicitly address the seriousness of racism was directly followed by Denise's assertion that she is actually a victim of racism. Whiteness has taught her to discipline herself when humanizing desires rise to the surface, in this case, by claiming to be wronged because of the color of her skin, thereby suppressing this prohibited feeling.

The melancholia of Denise's ambivalent behavior exists as a type of neurotic resistance to coming to terms with her own oppressive identity. This neurosis can be characterized as the subject divided against itself, where a split occurs that causes a kind of compulsive trauma to take place both intrapsychically and interpersonally. Layton

(2006) uses the term "normative unconscious processes" to mark the maintenance of this split which compels us to "repeat those affect/behavior/cognition patterns that uphold the very social norms that cause psychic distress in the first place" (p. 67). The balancing act that Denise struggled to preserve became a psycho-social maneuver to deal with the guilt and shame she felt concerning her identity and her actions. These patterns are linked to the moments when social interactions heighten white people's vulnerabilities regarding their white identity. Or as Straker (2004) explains, "The periphery of consciousness becomes its center in the act of apprehension—the spectral haunting at the periphery becomes known for what it is, a horror that lies at the heart of one's own group identification" (p. 410). The instances where Denise became conscious of her white identity was when she felt the most melancholic. As a result, her neurotic compulsion to suppress these feelings directed her to deny that her actions and behaviors were racist.

Despite Denise's interest in learning about issues of race in the classroom, the mere thought of taking action to address racism produced a reaction that compelled her to think of *herself* as racially oppressed. This neurotic behavior is a testament to the hegemonic power of whiteness and its ability to shape the morals and values of the white subject. Denise's expression of guilt concerning her friends, even though she believed that she could put racism on the "front burner," led her to blame people of color for her problems. As Altman (2006) posits, "When guilt cannot be tolerated, the solution is often to deny that damage was done or to blame the victim" (p. 57). However, one must not lose sight of the role of white shame in this interaction. Denise's guilt over her actions caused her to confront the shame at the core of her own white subjectivity, which was no doubt heightened by her interaction with myself as the interviewer, her former black

teacher, who she respected and cared for. At the center of Denise's angst is the normative unconscious process that white racialization elicits, which pressures her to invest in the fallacy of white victimization in order to assuage the racial trauma that she felt. Layton (2006) proclaims, "We have become so caught up in saving our own skins and soothing our own anxieties that we can no longer see how our fate is intertwined with the fate of others" (p. 69). The end of our interview found Denise "saving her own skin" in the face of increasing nervousness surrounding her attachments to whiteness, which manifested through neurosis.

Jennifer and Sara: Racial Abuse from White Male Authority Figures

Denise's tendency to "brush off" racially insensitive language was motivated by the desire to maintain relationships with her white friend group. The social bonds of whiteness are strengthened through a persistent fear of abandonment from the white community, and in Denise's case, denouncing her friend's language could have jeopardized their relationship. However, this fear of rejection becomes more intense when confronted with the notion of abandonment from one's parents. Jennifer and Sara both encountered white racial abuse from their fathers outside of the AVID/IB classroom as they crossed over into non-white zones at school and in the classroom. This friction between home and school elicited various forms of racial abuse from these students' fathers, who sought to punish them for violating the rules of white racialization.

Jennifer was an intelligent, friendly, and somewhat quiet student I had known since her 10th grade year, where she was a student in my AVID/English class. During one

of our interviews she shared with me that her father disagreed with her dating a black male student that also attended Sumner. She and I discussed what happened:

> J: I was dating a black boy and my dad had problems with that—he was mad about that. It's a big problem with my dad, but I don't see it as a problem and neither does my mom, but then I come to school and it's fine. So at home it's a bigger issue.
>
> JG: How did your dad find out that you were dating a black boy? Did you bring him home?
>
> J: Yeah, he came over to my house.
>
> JG: And what was your dad's reaction to that?
>
> J: Well he acted normal when he was around. He doesn't really say anything about it, but then he has to talk to me about it when he leaves. He always has these comments like "Why can't you talk to a white boy? Why can't you? Are you just not interested in them or something?" He always says little comments that are annoying.
>
> JG: How do you feel about that when he says that stuff?
>
> J: I don't like it. I went to therapy because he made me so mad.
>
> JG: Really?
>
> J: Yeah. [Jennifer starts to sob deeply as if she could no longer hold in her emotions. We paused for several minutes until she calmed down].
>
> JG: Is everything better now?

J: He never agreed to coming to it [therapy] with me so I don't know. It's gotten better because I just try to ignore him and not talk to him about those things. (Interview, 2/27/15)

Jennifer was navigating two opposing sets of racial boundaries—one where race-mixing was forbidden (home) and the other accepted (school). It is unclear if Jennifer knew that bringing her black friend into her home would subject her to her dad's racial abuse; she could have been testing racial boundaries by determining how far her father would let her travel into non-white zones (or in this case bringing non-white into white). Yet, what is perhaps most informative about the abuse, is that Jennifer's father waited until her friend left the house before chastising her. The blame was not directed toward the person of color for stepping foot into a "white zone," but instead the punishment sought to discipline Jennifer into suppressing her own desire to have close relationships with people who are not white and prohibit her from future non-white zone violations by sending the message that "blackness is not allowed in our home." Irby (2014) contends, this form of discipline seeks to surveil white girls as a method for maintaining white racial purity by discouraging interracial intimacy.

A similar conflict emerged when talking with Sara, a student I have known since she was a freshman at Sumner. Over several years I witnessed Sara develop into an open-minded person who thought critically about social justice. In class she often exhibited a compassionate attitude when learning about racial injustices, but her father often displayed racist behavior at home. She explains:

S: My dad is extremely racist. Well not extremely racist, but he is just like Ryan [a white student in the AVID/IB class that students widely recognized as having

racist viewpoints], but 55 years old. He kind of has that mindset, but kind of an olden days-type thing. So some things that come out of his mouth I am like, "Oh my God, how do you even come out of the house?"

When I asked Sara if she ever had discussions about race with her dad, she said:

S: Something will come up in the news like the Trayvon Martin thing. He was talking about, "He is a total hoodlum" like because of his hood being up and I was like, "Oh my gosh! Okay Dad." I called him out a few times before, but my parents are really strict so I can't really get away with that. But now that I am 18, I kind of can, but they still very much crack down on me. So it is quite frustrating with him. Even now I just let what he says kind of go under my radar. We have an okay relationship; I am close with my parents. I appreciate what they do for me, but when that comes into play it causes a strain. (Interview 3/5/15)

Sara endured racial abuse from her father, much like Jennifer, because of her willingness to challenge the dehumanization of blackness. Both Sara and Jennifer's fathers exhibited neurotic responses to their daughters' violations of the racial contract—that is, they castigated their daughters to obey whiteness by reinforcing the white rules of racialization.

The manner of punishment that Jennifer and Sara suffered from their fathers demonstrates the gendered nature of white racialization. As Deliovsky (2010) highlights, conceptions of white femininity are constructed through white Christian values predicated on the sexual purity of the white woman. This formation of white womanhood was established to discourage race-mixing as the "un-pure condition of blackness" was ideologically threatening to the purity of whiteness (Deliovsky, 2010, p. 31). The deeply

instilled fear of miscegenation motivated both Sara and Jennifer's fathers to exert their authority in relation to their daughters' proximity to black masculinity—subtly in the case of Sara's father calling Trayvon Martin a "hoodlum," and harshly regarding Jennifer's father repeated questioning around not dating a "white boy."

In both of these situations, the hegemony of whiteness became vulnerable due to the tension created between home and school. The white male authority figures in these students' lives lost a certain amount of control when their daughters were at school. Jennifer and Sara both found solace from their fathers' surveillance in the AVID/IB classroom, where they were not only able to enter non-white zones but also encouraged to release their repressed desires for social justice without fear of admonishment. Though there was relief within the classroom, it did not extinguish the racial abuse that took place inside the home. This tension illuminates the melancholic ambivalence of white subjectivity as there was a literal splitting that took place for Jennifer and Sara between home and school. Nonetheless, they both risked endangering their relationships with their fathers as they resisted the racial abuse that was occurring in their homes. This resistance resulted in both students attempting to ignore their fathers' racial abuse as they looked forward to leaving the household and going to college.

Ryan: Disavowal and Derailment

If Jennifer and Sara's conflicts with their fathers indicate an attempt to disinvest from their investments in the racial contract, then Ryan chose to double down on his investment. Over the four years I have known him, Ryan has been the staunchest defender of traditionally conservative American political values than anyone else in the

AVID/IB class. His racial politics emphasize a belief in colorblindness and a narrative that endorses the idea that if you work hard enough, you can achieve the "American dream." His beliefs have enabled him to discount the numerous examples of institutional and structural forms of racism that have been covered through the high school English curriculum he has received in grades 9-12. In fact, he referenced learning about racism as a detraction from his ability to develop writing skills:

> It [learning about racism] seems to be overpowering even over the English aspect of everything. What I mean is at this point I don't feel efficient in writing a paper, but I can tell you all about racism. Which I mean that's good, but bad that I can't write that good of a paper [This was said with a sarcastic tone]. (Interview, 3/3/15)

For Ryan, learning new racial knowledge was somehow a threat to his acquisition of academic skills he felt he needed in order to be successful, despite the fact that writing was frequently integrated into most lessons and units at every grade level. His perception of topics related to social justice often did not match the reality of the situation. His neurotic response to learning about race in the classroom was disavowal, making it possible to maintain his conservative views while repressing the notion that these views perpetuate white racialization.

Ryan's mechanism for disavowal was to exhibit colorblindness whenever the class discussed racism. For instance, when conversations surrounding racial violence occurred in class, such as the cases of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, Ryan's neurotic response was to treat the situation as if race was not a factor. He stated, "What I like to do is play the person that likes to take race out of it" (Interview, 3/3/15). This technique of

denial contains both a psychic and a social function for Ryan. Psychically, it conceals the shame that is produced by whites "when the reality of their racial practice is not shown to be congruent with their racial idealism" (Matias & Allen, 2013, p. 299). Disavowing racism acts as a melancholic response to white ambivalent racial identities. As Altman (2006) recognizes, this constant repudiation becomes an unstable condition because "the disavowed position is always there, haunting the self, requiring continual warding off" (p. 61). And as Cheng (2001) describes, the white person who maintains the ruse of colorblindness is the most melancholic of them all since "it requires hard work *not* to see" (Morrison, 1992, p. 17, italics in original).

The social purpose of disavowal for Ryan then becomes a product of the continual haunting of his shameful white subjectivity. His usage of colorblind language is designed to both avert shame and portray himself as an upstanding, moral, and caring person. This was quite apparent when I asked him about how he defines race and his response was to cite a Morgan Freeman[22] interview:

> The interviewer said what is the best way to stop racism? Morgan Freeman said "stop talking about it." And I mean that was a really interesting comment to me, because if we start treating people like people or treat the blacks like people, treat the Asians like people, and treat the whites like people—why don't we just treat people like people? That is big to me—if we just teach everyone to love everyone, what's the problem? When I was younger I did a lot of community service and I still do, but for example, my 10th birthday I said I don't want gifts, I want

[22] A famous African American actor who was interviewed by CNN about Barack Obama in 2014. Freeman proceeded to make a colorblind argument when asked about race being a factor when considering income inequality in the United States.

donations, and my birthday party gifts went to Feed My Starving Children[23]. (Interview, 3/3/15)

Ryan was often able to use erudite techniques for upholding colorblind arguments for the purposes of disavowing racism, as his answer to my question indicates.

Ryan's move toward using colorblind tactics to disavow racism was a powerful melancholic moment where white shame crept into consciousness. Here, the self-disciplining practices of the white subject triggered a response where Ryan recited a sophisticated story justifying colorblindness, and then, methodically followed with a personal story showing how he cares for others. These responses are framed within the context of the interaction between his black former teacher interviewing him about race and his positionality as the interviewee who must confront his racial viewpoints. This contrast intensified his melancholic responses as he sat across the table from the melancholic object (referring to my black identity)—making it even more difficult "not to see." His desperation to repress the shame at the heart of his racial identity motivated him to build an elaborate and sophisticated language of colorblindness, but it also compelled him to display an ethical disposition in relation to his message of sameness. He felt as though he should follow his colorblind statement with a defense of his moral character by giving an example of a past altruistic endeavor.

Although Ryan's routine of disavowing racism was refined and highly developed, it often failed to hold up during cross-racial dialogues in the AVID/IB classroom. The unstable nature of disavowing racism was often called out by both students of color and other white students in the class because Ryan's views on racial topics were seen as

[23] A nonprofit Christian organization that provides food for impoverished populations.

extreme. For example, during a classroom discussion concerning police brutality, Ryan sought to blame the victims of racial violence by using colorblind tactics:

> I feel like we highlight race so much that it becomes more of a problem. It's not even solving stuff, it's creating problems. Because, you know, there's white cops shooting white people and black cops shooting black people. Well, it's because they are doing something that they are not supposed to, risking someone's life or threatening an officer's life. Even if it's like on a school playground, they [police officers] are not just making up the scenario, the scenario is made by the choices someone [the victims of police violence] makes. (Fieldnotes, 2/12/15)

Comments like these were often met with severe opposition from students in the class. Ryan even admitted as much when he said somewhat sarcastically, "a lot of my opinions tend to be pretty unpopular is what it seems like" (Interview, 3/3/15).

The moments when Ryan's colorblind narrative began to break down were the point where his frustrations would rise to the surface: Since the colorblind neurotic cannot rely on logic to perpetuate the façade, their language inevitably fails. Ryan used his colorblind positionality to derail race conversations by funneling the discussion to focus on his fallible racial stance, using a discourse of "white fragility" (DiAngelo, 2011). Due to this discourse, he became more irritated and defensive when students challenged his viewpoint, which ultimately transformed critical race discussions into a majority of Ryan's classmates becoming angry at his comments. Ryan perceived this anger as a personal attack on his opinions. He shared:

> I say something and then the next thing they automatically just say nope. A lot of the times they don't even hear me out. I feel attacked a lot of the time. (Interview 3/3/15)

His increasingly neurotic behavior during these discussions triggered emotions of contempt for his classmates that caused the derailment of more productive conversations that could have taken place if the focus was not centered on what the class perceived as Ryan's outlandish perspectives.

Conclusion: Forgetting Childhood Racial Trauma

What unifies these somewhat disparate examples of white student struggles surrounding race is the social component of white racial abuse and the psychic element of white shame that coalesces to sustain white subjectivity. It is crucial to identify that what has been lost in this process is a remembrance of how these students have endured a psycho-social indoctrination into whiteness through childhood trauma. When interviewing students in the AVID/IB class, I asked about their earliest memories of discerning racial differences. For students of color, this question was often answered with a visceral recollection of a racist incident that they endured in childhood. However, for the white students, this question was often met with a bewildered reaction as most students could not remember when they first noticed race. Two white students offered responses that indicate the manner in which childhood white racial abuse is repressed and ultimately forgotten. Anna shared a story that she only remembered after I asked her about her earliest racial memories:

> There was one time when my friend [of color] didn't have a ride home from my house one night and it was 1:00 in the morning. My mom was like "well they will probably steal something, so they can't sleep here tonight." So she drove them home at 1:00 in the morning. I was like "well we will sleep on the floor, it's fine." And because we were younger, I said "Sorry, I didn't know they didn't have a ride." She's like "well they are going to steal something so they need to go home."

Anna looked both pained and surprised as she told this story. After telling the story she commented:

> Well, I just put that together. I didn't think about that growing up. I just thought about that now. (Interview, 3/5/15)

Conversely, Devin had an immediate recollection to this same question as he told me about a black boy that attended his elementary school:

> Something sticks out to me very clearly. Back when I was in first through third grade there was one black kid in my grade and I remember just thinking that he looked weird. And I remember thinking that just because he looked weird, I didn't really want to be in his class and I didn't really want to get to know him.

I then asked Devin what made him think that this boy was weird and he said:

> I don't really know. I can't remember why I thought that way, I just did. (Interview, 2/25/15)

In the cases of Anna and Devin, they are both recognizing past traumatic racial experiences from childhood that had been previously repressed. For Anna, this remembrance came in the form of a memory spurred by my question about racial

differences. For Devin, his memory was clear, but the reasons he felt this way were unknown. Melancholia's psychoanalytic roots are helpful in uncovering how this trauma becomes a barrier to understanding white racialization for white students that have been subjected to white racial abuse. The formation of melancholic trauma occurs in a similar fashion to Freud's (1920) description of traumatic neurosis where an injury occurs to an individual that elicits an intense emotional shock.[24] Then the memory of the wound is forgotten as those suffering from traumatic neurosis "are more concerned with *not* thinking about it" (Freud, 1920, p. 12, italics in original). Caruth (1996) extends Freud's notion of traumatic neurosis to include the manner in which the repressed traumatic event is forced into the unconscious and creates a repetitive form of trauma to emerge as a result. That is, since the trauma is displaced through repressed memories, the individual is doomed to repeat the traumatic experience over and over again. Both Anna and Devin, as well as the other white students in the AVID/IB class, are afflicted by childhood white racial abuse that has been repressed, distorting the dehumanizing construction of their white identities. This process includes the stifling of humanizing desires for social justice and the required compliance with regard to the terms of the racial contract, which hegemonizes white supremacy.

Resistance to both learning about race and taking actions to counter racism is disrupted by white racial melancholia. Matias and Allen (2013) urge white people to recognize the painful feelings associated with unraveling white racialization in order to alleviate the impulsive neurotic behaviors associated with becoming anti-racist. And

[24] Freud's initial analysis pertained to soldiers injured during war, but I believe this comparison is also applicable to childhood racial injury, as Freud's subsequent example came in the form of a child playing, i.e. Freud's (1920) 'fort' [gone] 'da' [here] experiment.

Suchet (2007) declares, “For those of us who work hard on being anti-racist we have to be more vigilant as to how we carry our racism, our shame, and our whiteness” (p. 872). Yet, how can white people unravel whiteness, be vigilant in the face of shame, and work hard to be anti-racist if melancholia prevents them from understanding how their subjectivities are attached to a dehumanizing reality in the first place? Here, we can begin to make some curricular and pedagogical considerations for the development of white anti-racism by combating the psycho-social effects of white racial melancholia. Though the AVID/IB class was provided opportunities to learn and discuss topics related to race, there was not an explicit exploration of whiteness itself. If students are going to understand how whiteness has disabled their ability to create a more humanizing existence, they will need to decipher how white racialization functions to oppress. This highlights the importance of storytelling as a method for untangling and naming the “silent grief” of melancholia (Ruti, 2005). These stories can come in the form of analyzing the narratives of white activists who have struggled to resist racism (Grinage, 2014) and/or through self-narrativized storytelling related to seeking ways “to name this [melancholic] grief so as to empower the subject to bring its past into the present in a dynamic manner” (Ruti, 2005, p. 651). A curriculum and pedagogy specifically pertaining to comprehending the shame related to white ambivalence through storytelling engages Dutro and Bien’s (2013) conceptualization of “critical witnessing” by being attuned to the ways in which trauma has inflicted injuries through systemic injustices and how these injuries affect youth inside schools and classrooms. Layering these types of stories can be useful in creating space (both psychic and social) for white students to work through the melancholia at the core of their white subjectivity.

The heart of racial melancholia for white students in the AVID/IB classroom was the struggle to identify with racial loss relative to their own identities. The naming of "silent grief" involves confronting the repressed feelings of shame that whiteness has instilled by denying white people a humanizing existence. Conversely, the "object" of white racial melancholia are the victims of the dehumanizing structure of white supremacy, people of color who have no choice but to endure the violence of whiteness. The next chapter explores how this endurance of racial violence plays out in schools and classrooms through an analysis of the methods in which black students navigated traumatic environments at Sumner. This chapter elucidates how racial melancholia intersects with theories of mourning in the context of black grief.

Chapter 6

Endless Mourning: Black Grief and the Possibilities for Individual and Collective Bereavement

This isn't black anger; this is black grief!

Danny Givens (pastor and Black Lives Matter activist)

Introduction

In order to demonstrate the complexities of mourning, Leader (2008), in his book on mourning, melancholia, and depression, cites a well-known Buddhist story that depicts a woman's grief regarding the loss of her first child. The woman carries her dead child strapped to her chest in search of a treatment to somehow cure him. She eventually finds a holy man who instructs her to retrieve mustard seeds from a home where no one has ever died. As she searches for the seeds, she travels from village to village listening to tales of death and loss. Eventually, she realizes that she cannot find a house without death and, as a result, discovers that she is not alone in her grief. With this discovery, she is at last able to put her child's body to rest.

Leader shares this story in connection with Calle's (2004) art project, a gathering of interpretive photographs that were taken to illustrate Freud's conceptualization of mourning. The book of photographs depicts a woman, alone in her hotel room, after her lover has ended their relationship. The series of photos, ninety-nine in total, describes how the woman dealt with the breakup over one night. Each page displays a single photograph on one side, and the opposite page contains text from various friends and

strangers answering Calle's question: "When did you suffer most?" Leader (2008) comments about the association between photography and text: "It's as if Calle needs other people's stories to process her own *as a story*" (p. 89, italics in original). Both of these examples indicate how individual, private forms of mourning were unsuccessful until collective, public dimensions of mourning were introduced.

Compare these stories of mourning with the quote at the beginning of this chapter. Danny Givens yells into a megaphone as he addresses the crowd during a Black Lives Matter protest on behalf of Jamar Clark, a black man slain at the hands of two police officers. The St. Paul, Minnesota, rally was organized after it was announced that the two officers were not going to be charged for Clark's death. This decision came in the wake of the murder of Philando Castile, another black man shot by a police officer in a neighborhood close to where Clark was shot, which occurred just a week before the decision not to charge the officers involved in Clark's death. The local community was reeling from these traumas and the protest served as an outlet for grief. Certainly Givens characterized his angry feelings surrounding these deaths as an expression of grief as he spoke to the crowd, but can this protest be framed as a collective form of mourning for this community in despair? And is there any way to "get over" these losses? To answer these questions, we must consider how the existence of racial violence and the loss resulting from this violence is a ceaseless component of racism. When we attempt to mourn our losses, new losses emerge before we can even process the old ones. The accumulation of racial loss is a central concern for theories related to race, grief, mourning, and melancholia.

Looking more closely at Givens' rage surrounding racial violence, we find that he embodies what it means to accumulate losses. During the past eight years, he has attended and presided over ten funerals of immediate and extended family members, not including Philando Castile, who just happened to be his brother's best friend (Rosario, 2016). Although not all of these deaths were due to racially motivated incidents, it does illustrate Givens' willingness to persevere in the face of constant grief. When yelling to the crowd of protesters, he is articulating a distinct mode of mourning by clarifying that the anger black people feel about racial violence is in itself an expression of grieving. The protestors are simultaneously practicing a communal form of mourning and collectively resisting future racial violence through their expressions of sorrow. Givens' attempt at explicating this type of mourning speaks to a lack of understanding about the process of mourning itself, as he has to explain the purposes for his anger (presumably for people that misinterpret black rage as unfounded), but it also works to identify practices for mourning in spite of the constant presence of racial melancholia in the lives of this community stricken by the horrors of police brutality.

What these instances of mourning tell us is that there are benefits to developing methods for people to find a mutual space for public grieving. However, there is a clear contrast between the grief experienced by the woman that lost her child in the Buddhist story and the woman who lost her lover in the series of photographs and Givens and the crowd of protesters. The two stories, juxtaposed with the backdrop of Givens and the cumulative trauma engendered by racial violence, position forms of racial grief as interminable. Leader's (2008) examples underscore singular loss for an individual—only one child perished and only one lover was lost, but for Givens, these losses seem to

multiply. How do we find methods for mourning the lives lost due to racism in the midst of racial violence and death repetitiously occurring all around us? Raising this question demands that we theorize melancholia in the context of how we seek to mourn racial loss.

This chapter makes connections between mourning and melancholia in relation to education. The melancholy of schooling suggests that for black students who endure racism on multiple levels, trauma is a crucial aspect of their educational lives. Mapping the ways in which black students in the AVID/IB class experienced various racial traumas through identifying instances of both paralysis and resistance, I examine the generative possibilities for productive forms of melancholia and mourning. I first elucidate the differences between mourning and melancholia in the context of racial grief. I then highlight how disarticulated grief and ambiguous loss contribute to an inability to mourn racial losses for black students who attended Sumner High School. Following this analysis, I illustrate examples of black students who both individually and collectively struggled to endure their racial traumas and engendered pathways for agency in spite of their racial wounds. Lastly, I introduce a conceptualization of classroom space that can act as a site for collective mourning in which racial grief can be identified, symbolized, and addressed.

Endless Mourning

In Freud's (1917) foundational essay *Mourning and Melancholia*, he defined mourning as diametrically opposed to melancholia with regard to the function of mourning as a healthy process of overcoming the loss of a person, object, or ideal. Therefore, conversely, he established melancholia as a fundamentally pathological

response to loss because he believed the work of mourning led to a completion of one's attachment to the loss by freeing one's ego from pain and displeasure, whereas melancholia led to an impoverished and worthless ego. His essay helped to create the idea that melancholia was a debilitating syndrome. What is sometimes overlooked and important to distinguish here is Freud's (1923) revision of his theory on mourning and melancholia written later in his life in *The Ego and the Id*. This updated account of grief (and the culmination of Freud's thinking on the topic) suggests that the pathological failure of mourning, originally defined by Freud as melancholia, is actually a necessary condition for mourning to be able to take place. Clewell (2004) further notes, "Freud collapses the strict opposition between mourning and melancholia, making melancholy identification integral to the work of mourning. As a result, his work substantially revises our understanding of what it means to work through loss" (p. 61). This theoretical shift positions melancholia as a necessary aspect of being able to mourn. Therefore, "working through" loss in order to successfully mourn someone or something does not require the goal of mourning to be a relinquishing of the lost object. Instead, the work of addressing loss involves a process of negotiation between mourning and melancholia which indicates that the practice of mourning can never be completed (Clewell, 2004). Leader (2008) comments, "The cliché that losses need to be worked through so that we can move beyond them suggests that mourning is something that can be done and dusted. Living with loss is what matters" (p. 99).

Givens, for example, has learned to exist with death in a nation-state that has been built on loss and continues to function through violence. Which brings us to the matter of "living with loss" that frames the relationship between experiencing racial melancholia

and mourning our racial losses. Building on Freud's acknowledgment that melancholia is an indispensable component of mourning, Cheng (2001) identifies the presence of racial trauma, its impact on the racially marginalized, and the methods in which these populations survive and cope, not as a process of "working through" or a "getting over" but instead as a struggle for survival that involves a constant negotiation between melancholia and mourning. Similarly, Eng (2000) challenges the idea that melancholia is entirely harmful by stating that it is a normative construct—an ordinary psychic attribute that engenders racial identity itself. Establishing melancholia as a non-pathological psychic mechanism is not to say that there are not unhealthy psychic and/or social effects that emerge, but to call melancholia a solely damaging formation of subjectivity would mean that we would lose sight of productive measures of mourning that can enable agency in the face of racial subjugation. In fact, both Cheng (2001) and Eng's (2000) principal argument is that because racially oppressed populations in the U.S. are more susceptible to melancholia (as violence and the loss stemming from this violence becomes a core characteristic of racism), there is a social component of melancholia for these groups, where shared histories of loss can provide spaces for mourning to take place. This theory of mourning and melancholia enables a reconceptualization of "what it means for the suffering racial body to heal" (Cheng 2001, p. 94).

The definition of racial suffering and the possibilities for healing need to be contextualized through the lens of racialization and the dominant role that race plays in U.S. society. Racial trauma in the U.S. contains a static quality related to the enduring legacy of racism and the fact that the nation was founded upon the bodies of black, brown, and indigenous peoples. This has created a "social machinery" (Martinot, 2010)

of white supremacy incapable of ever completely breaking down. Bell's (1992) notion of the permanence of racism as a persistent component of American life suggests that racial trauma resulting from this fixed element is also never-ending. Thus, in structuring a framework for racial melancholia and understanding mourning's place within this framework, we must acknowledge the constant production of trauma relative to the racially oppressed. Within this framework, the individual or group experiencing racial trauma cannot hope to entirely shed themselves of this trauma since new traumas emerge in place of the old ones. Therefore, mourning is endless insofar as racial loss and racial trauma is a permanent fixture of subjectivity. Moglen (2005) states, "analyses of socially induced loss must account for processes of grieving which the bereaved sustain ongoing relations to the objects they are persistently losing and to the social pressures that are persistently injuring them" (p. 160). The suffering racial body will never fully heal because it is constantly being reinjured, but completely healing (or relinquishing loss) perhaps may not be the goal in the first place. If melancholia is needed in order for mourning to take place, then the relationship between the two must be one of negotiation since the permanence of our traumas requires us to develop methods for bereavement dedicated to living with loss, instead of absconding loss.

To what extent does the negotiation between mourning and melancholia help frame the construction and production of trauma in the lives of black students both inside and outside the AVID/IB classroom? This question is important considering the often-used racist discourse of determining black student failure (or achievement) using "deficit thinking" (Valencia, 1997), where racial trauma is defined in the pathological sense, in order to blame students for various perceived cultural and racial deficiencies rather than

place blame on the schools and classrooms that often exacerbate this trauma. Bell's (1992) concept of the permanence of racism also applies to education according to DeCuir and Dixson's (2004) elucidation of a critical race theory analysis of racism's impact on black students. Following their argument, if racism is a permanent feature of psychological, social, and political domains in America, including education, then racial trauma must also be defined as an enduring aspect of schools and classrooms. In his essay on melancholia, Eng (2000) refers to the classroom as a melancholic space for black students by highlighting Fanon's (1967) observation that in a white supremacist social structure, black students diminish their self-worth "through forced identification with socially disparaged ideals of blackness" and as Eng (2000) further notes, "this is a normative structure of daily life" (p. 1279). The rest of this chapter positions the permanence of racial trauma as a starting point for illuminating the various methods that black students negotiated mourning and melancholia. Both individually and collectively, several of these students were harmed, restricted, and burdened by traumas they faced inside and outside of school, but there were also instances of resistance, resilience, and agency that transpired as well. These examples help to underscore the generative aspects of melancholic trauma for black youth in education.

Disarticulated Grief and the Silencing of Race

If melancholia is a permanent feature of a racially minoritized identity, then to what extent is this grief understood by those that are traumatized by it? And to what extent does the conscious expression of this grief receive public recognition as a translation of racial loss? As a manifestation of grief instead of unsubstantiated anger,

Givens' declaration of his rage over police violence in his community speaks to the fact that even if one can find ways to grieve one's losses, people may not even recognize that there is a reason for the racially oppressed to grieve in the first place. It is clear that to some degree, Givens is aware of experiencing racial trauma and has been able to shift "from suffering injury to speaking out against that injury" (Cheng, 2001, p. 3) at the protest. And it is also clear that he found public space to express his grief. Yet, to some extent, his sorrow falls on deaf ears as the denial of racism continues to restrict public places for confronting racial traumas. For students of color, schools and classrooms can act as a space for learning methods for diagnosing and resisting the traumas that afflict them by increasing their racial literacy and subsequently expanding their capacity to gain influence over the forces that oppress them. Unfortunately, education often worsens the racial traumas that youth of color face through policies and practices that uphold white dominance (Leonardo, 2009).

Within Sumner High School, students of color are subjected to various occurrences of racism, including inappropriate teacher behavior, racial incidents in the hallways, and Eurocentric curriculum, to name a few. However, what may be the most flagrant disregard for students of color and their ability to confront their traumas is educators' refusal to teach, discuss, or even mention the topic of race in their courses. This refusal to discuss race was even more glaringly evident considering the public displays of police violence occurring across the nation, many of which were captured through videos recorded on cell phones and displayed on social media.[25] These videos made it difficult to continue to ignore race, especially since police brutality became a

[25] One example is the cell phone recording of Eric Garner being choked to death by a group of police officers in the middle of the day on a crowded New York street.

common subject of conversation within informal spaces outside of the classroom. Almost unanimously, students indicated that the only class in which racial topics were openly taught and discussed was in the AVID/IB class.

The absence of race conversations in classrooms at Sumner had a particularly damaging effect on black students, many of whom were experiencing additional fears related to the array of black lives destroyed by police violence. One such student, Monica, shared an incident in which she asked her teacher a question related to the material being taught. The question was about race, and the teacher chastised Monica for inquiring and accused her of blaming teachers. She stated:

> I asked my geography teacher, I said, 'Why do you think that our state has some of the best test scores in the nation, but we are leading the nation for the biggest achievement gap?' You know he kind of got offended by that and asked me why I think it's the teacher's fault. (Interview, 5/19/15)

Monica's attempt to understand how racism functions in society, in this case asking about racial disparities in education, was not only thoroughly denied by the teacher, but was treated as an inappropriate question. The way Monica felt about this interaction illustrates the prohibitive nature of racial discourse in classrooms at Sumner. She explained:

> Usually you would expect someone to feel awkward [when the teacher responded to her question], but I wasn't awkward. I didn't feel shocked because it was something that I kind of expected, but I did feel angry because he's a teacher and him being in his position, I feel like he should have created more of a relationship there with that question. That's not a question you get offended by, especially at a time when a student is asking you a question like that and they feel comfortable

> enough to ask you a question like that, that's not a time where you make them feel like that was an inappropriate question. But I felt like, for me, he crossed the boundaries. His reaction is not okay, and I was angry, but I wasn't shocked. (Interview, 5/19/15)

The manner in which the teacher silenced Monica's curiosity about race is not an uncommon occurrence. As education researchers have identified, this form of avoidance perpetuates white hegemonic ideologies within school and classroom spaces (Castagno, 2008; Pollock, 2004). Monica's reaction, because she was angered but certainly not surprised by the teacher's response, mirrored how many black students felt about how teachers viewed the importance of race at Sumner—that is, insignificant, inconsequential, and irrelevant.

Monica's admission about the way she felt when her question was rebuffed also contained a reference to the power dynamics of the interaction when she mentioned the teacher as being in a position to cut off communication with her. This emphasizes the authority the teacher had to silence race dialogue in their classroom. The teacher's refusal to answer the question and their subsequent admonishment of Monica for attempting to ask the question signals a "social etiquette of the dominant culture, which includes knowing where and when to raise a particular issue" (Castagno, 2008, p. 325). Monica, along with other students in the class, was being taught that not only should race not be discussed in class, but it is actually impolite to do so. Her lack of surprise when the teacher "acted offended" indeed suggests that these forms of social etiquette are entrenched institutional procedures. James reiterated the authoritative position that

teachers hold when silencing race dialogue at Sumner. When I asked him why his teachers never discussed race in their classrooms, he immediately responded:

> Straight up because white people are not comfortable talking about that stuff. Especially white people in positions of power . . . white male teachers, which is a lot of my teachers that isn't Mr. Turner, why do they have to worry about race? They are not affected by race. They may not even think that or know that about themselves. It is something they are not aware of. They are in a privileged position. They are white, male so they don't realize it is an issue for other people so it doesn't get talked about in class. (Interview, 2/13/15)

The ways that Monica and James' teachers silenced racial issues in their classrooms restricted access to learning or dialogue regarding racism's impact on society for students who attended Sumner High School.

The consequences of silencing race at Sumner had an insidious effect on black students in the context of their racial grief. One such impact took place on an institutional level because Sumner exhibited a particular kind of "systemic melancholia" that structures institutions with dominant white values (Vaught, 2012). What Vaught (2012) labels as "institutional racist melancholia" calls attention to an organization's ability to shape psychic and affective foundations of grief, which, in the case of these types of institutions, "conceptually suggests that the irreconcilability of dominant meaning making creates an unresolvable institutional grief" (p. 61). The formation of this unresolvable institutional grief emerges through the racial silence exhibited by the teachers at the school. That is, the institution perpetuates a melancholic narrative of equal access for all, despite the ingrained nationwide and local racial disparities related to the

educational opportunity gap (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Vaught (2012) indicates that this dominant mode of discourse establishes an environment where racial injury is denied recognition and in the process becomes naturalized and unresolved. For instance, Monica directly questioned how test scores are influenced by race and was denied the opportunity to have a conversation about how this form of oppression functions in her life. The injurious effects of racial disparities, as well as other types of racism inflicted on the body and psyche, are unrecognized by the school, which conceals the manner in which the school itself produces racial traumas that impact the lives of black students at Sumner.

The production and ensuing obfuscation of racial trauma stemming from Sumner's institutional melancholia fosters what Cheng (2001) refers to as *disarticulated grief*—a form of sorrow where the cause of one's grief becomes disconnected from the original loss. In other words, one may understand that they have incurred racial injury, but one cannot clearly identify how and why they were (and continue to be) injured. What I am suggesting here is that the structurally designed silencing of race within classrooms, the racial trauma experienced by students, and the psycho-social consequences of these interactions disable opportunities for mourning. Moglen (2005) theorizes that socially induced forms of trauma cross over into psychic boundaries, and as a result, injuries are seldom understood or identifiable since these traumas are often experienced in an indefinite manner (e.g. chattel slavery or the Holocaust). In the case of the racial melancholic, the lost object—loss experienced as a result of past and present forms of racial violence—becomes an ambiguous loss through disarticulated grief. Moglen (2005) explains the psycho-social impact of this trauma:

> People experience structural social injuries as traumas when they do not possess adequate analyses of the processes or formations that have harmed them. In the absence of such social or historical accounts, they will experience these processes not merely as injurious, but as mysteriously and inexplicably so. It is the lack of adequately explanatory social narratives that makes these catastrophic experiences not only painful but psychically unassimilable. (p. 161)

Most classrooms at Sumner prevented a development of methods for black students to mourn by disabling their ability to discern the various forms of violence that have been committed by the U.S. nation-state, which shapes how racial traumas are experienced.

The Language of Mourning

If the concept of "working through" loss is the practice of fluid negotiation between mourning and melancholia, the racial melancholic must be able to establish methods for transitioning back and forth between the two. This is often difficult. For instance, the disarticulation of racial grief may cause failed attempts at mourning, since the melancholic cannot clearly communicate how their losses have been suffered. Leader (2008) categorizes the inability to mourn as a problem at the level of language and representation. Leader (2008) argues, "A central problem of melancholia is the reference of words to things . . . the melancholic suffers from the abyss separating language and its referents" (p. 190). He further posits, citing Freud's (1895) work on representation, that mourning occurs through "the possibility of a movement between *thing* representations and *word* representations" (Leader, 2008, p. 189, italics added). However compelling this declaration seems to be, we also have to consider Freud's limited research on mourning

(he was mostly concerned with melancholia) and the social component of oppression that Freud did not address in his work. There needs to be further theoretical work done in the area of mourning in the context of social suffering (Moglen, 2005). Nonetheless, underscoring the links between language and mourning can offer key insights into how people seek to resist and liberate themselves when encountering racial trauma.

What can be gleaned from the idea of an underdeveloped representational language for mourning is the notion that silencing race dialogue at Sumner contributes to obstructing the process of bereavement for students through a denial of voice. This is certainly a pedagogical concern, but there are curriculum implications at work here as well. It is one thing to not discuss race, but it is quite another to conceal the racial history of a nation. An example of this form of curricular omission was discussed by Carla, a female black student, who was often interested in issues related to the local black community and had a strong desire to learn about black history. I asked Carla how she reacted to witnessing racist incidents in the school and she shared a story about a white teacher who removed her from class:

> I had this scarf on, and that's where ignorance comes in, I had this little African scarf on that I wear around my neck. And the [history] teacher said that wasn't appropriate and I notice some of the white kids in class have things like inappropriate shirts and what not, but that was not a problem. And I got kicked out.

I then asked her how she felt about how the teacher responded to her wearing the scarf and she said:

> I feel like wearing the scarf can represent my culture to support diversity. I should be able to do that . . . people may not see this as being racism, and this is one of the unseen things, but the fact that there's not enough talk about black stuff that went on. All my years studying being in school since third grade, it's always been the Holocaust. Yes, that's good to talk about, but okay. It's always been certain types of topics and then Black History Month. They don't really tell you things. At the same time, how come I don't see anyone in a textbook that looks like me and how am I supposed to excel when I don't know about these [historical] figures, when I don't have teachers talking to the class about these things? (Interview, 2/26/15)

Carla's story about her removal from class for wearing a scarf and her desire for curriculum that addressed black history are both linked to the production of racial trauma and the lack of language for mourning. Her depiction of the teacher's racism is a form of traumatic experience that she was forced to endure, which occurred in a public space where opportunities for mourning were prohibited, since the teacher simply removed Carla from the classroom instead of allowing her to express her black heritage. The underlying layer of melancholia is the narrative eradicating black history from the school curriculum. There is an interruption concerning Carla's desire to represent her racial heritage by wearing the African scarf and the elimination of the historical roots of this very same heritage, through the continued denial of a language to name the referents of one's racial grief. This denial represents the "abyss" separating words and things.

The pedagogical and curricular shortcomings at Sumner indicate the social aspect of a language chasm for Carla, Monica, and other black students, interrupting instances

for mourning social injury. However, there is also the matter of the internal: the processes involving how outside traumas enter into psychic space, which is an influential characteristic of mourning and melancholia. Cheng (2001) writes, "Since there is no external structure to house the painful effects of racism, its complex legacies of anger, shame, and guilt can only be internalized" (p. 172). A psychoanalytic account of the internalization of loss is provided by Abraham and Torok's (1994) writing on incorporation and introjection. Their depiction of psychic responses to loss attribute unhealthy forms of mourning to an incorporation of the lost object through what they call an *intrapsychic crypt*, where "inexpressible mourning erects a secret tomb inside the subject" (Abraham & Torok, 1994, p. 130). The entombment of loss for the subject represents a form of repression where the path to introjection, or the progression toward healthy methods for mourning, is blocked due to the fact that language is stifled. Abraham and Torok (1994) state, "Because our mouth is unable to say certain words and unable to formulate certain sentences, we fantasize, for reasons yet to be determined, that we are actually taking into our mouth the unnamable, the object itself" (p. 128). The fantasy at work here acts as a misguided form of mourning where the subject imagines they are addressing the loss, when in reality, the loss is hidden inside the intrapsychic tomb within the subject. The incorporation of loss becomes a fantasized version of introjection—the subject believes they are mourning when in actuality they are exhibiting melancholia.

There are limitations to Abraham and Torok's theory of incorporation and introjection in the context of racial grief, as the differences between mourning and melancholia become muddled when attempting to distinguish between healthy and

unhealthy processes of bereavement. Cheng (2001) notes that there may not be distinguishable conceptions of healthy types of introjection since unhealthy occurrences of incorporation are needed to enable introjection in the first place. Be that as it may, Abraham and Torok's illustration of the internalization of loss and the inability to formulate a language to recognize grief is crucial to consider for black students at Sumner who have been subjected to trauma. The lack of a language for translating the traumas that one is experiencing leads to problems related to liberating oneself from oppressive restraints. For example, Carla referenced the same teacher that discriminated against her African scarf as also judging her for being black. She said:

> Sometimes when a teacher sees you as a black person it's like automatically they say 'oh you don't understand this and this.' He spoke down to me and you know what made me feel even better was at the end of the trimester, I proved that I can do this because I had the highest scores on tests and quizzes. (Interview, 2/26/15)

Carla's motivation to alleviate her anger by proving to the teacher that she can do well in the class found her embracing the very same curriculum that she was previously criticizing. This illustrates the muddled nature of mourning and melancholia through the double bind created from institutional racist melancholia. Carla's racial injury, incurred through the denied access to black history and her teacher's repeated discriminatory behavior, underscores the notion of assimilation as a method for survival in the context of confronting racial trauma. It is critical to consider "the intricate *relationship between grief and survival that assimilation stages*" (Cheng, 2001, p. 96, italics in original). For Carla to survive at Sumner she must assimilate to a certain degree, in order to obtain the necessary grades to be able to pass her classes and graduate from high school. However,

assimilation also means that she is attaching herself to the same traumas that guarantee her racial grief. The danger of assimilation involves slipping too far into the language abyss where any type of mourning becomes unattainable. Carla's embrace of the curriculum she despises means that she is also embracing what Hill (2008) calls the "everyday language of white racism," a linguistic ideology that reifies white dominance through a development of language practices that inculcate racism. This adherence to the language of white racism at Sumner refers to the practices of racial silence and omissions of black history in the curriculum that contribute to an underdeveloped language for mourning. Attempting to develop a language for mourning in relation to assimilation highlights the need for understanding the internal and external consequences of racial injury. Knowing our "wounded attachments" (Brown, 1995) can often be the difference between slipping into a form of melancholia where the racially oppressed actively invest in their own suffering rather than liberating themselves despite these attachments.

"Double" Consciousness, Suffering, and Loss

Thus far, the examples I have provided engage individual dimensions of mourning and melancholia where black students struggled against institutional procedures, racist teacher behavior, and curricular inadequacies through instances of solitary grief. Monica and Carla's depictions of racist experiences in classrooms at Sumner can be understood as a profound type of suffering requiring them to endure traumas elicited by school policies and practices. This pain was apparent when I asked Carla if experiencing racist incidents at Sumner changed the way she thought about school. She replied, "No because at the end of the day I still have to come here. I feel a

lot of ways about the school, but what can I do? Either way I still have to come here" (Interview, 2/26/15). Carla was resigned to the fact that she had to be exposed to racial trauma since she had no choice but to attend school every day. Her acquiescence points to the exacerbation of racial melancholia that Dumas (2014) characterizes as connected to the elusiveness of educational equity and upward social mobility for black students. The fallacy of education as a sure way for black students to achieve and improve their life chances leads Dumas (2014) to call schooling a "site for black suffering." He believes the intensification of racial melancholia is attached to black students who display an increased awareness of the myth of educational equity. This suffering is manifested through collective historical memories that are psychically linked to the nation-state's pattern of racial exclusion, a pattern that has existed since slavery and still haunts us in the present time.

Dumas' (2014) conception of black suffering in schools emphasizes the collective struggle for survival that black communities face on an everyday basis. He defines collective traumas amassed by blacks in America as the experience of multiple states of injury, inflicted from multiple locations, which shape the historical, social, and psychic structures of black identity. This positions black grief as a complexly layered form of suffering. In order to illustrate the complexities of experiencing racism in black life, various scholars have used the signifier "double," referencing the psycho-social aspects of racial trauma. The most prominent example of this signifier within African American studies is Du Bois' (1995) theory of "double consciousness," used to describe a black self-consciousness split between the way blacks view themselves and the way they are viewed by the white world surrounding them. Du Bois' (1995) symbolization of double

consciousness underscores the psycho-social splitting of black identity as a feeling of "two-ness." Du Bois (1995) illustrates this splitting as "two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. 9). These "unreconciled, warring ideals" become an expression of America's melancholic relationship with race and the internalization of these hypocritical values within the black body. Furthermore, Du Bois (1995) identifies a key attribute of a non-pathologized theory of racial melancholia when referring to the "dogged strength" of blackness to be able to survive trauma. The persistence and endurance of black strength when faced with centuries of racial discrimination is a generative characteristic of both racial melancholia and double consciousness.

Further references to "double" are made by Frost and Hoggett's (2008) term "double suffering" and Cheng's (2001) notion of "double loss." Both of these conceptualizations of doubling engage psycho-social theories of trauma. Frost and Hoggett (2008) define double suffering as circumstances where people face experiences "as powerless objects rather than as active agents" (p. 449). They refer to the double in this scenario as the existence of both conscious and unconscious forms of suffering, where unconscious pain, metaphorically speaking, is eaten, becomes indigestible, and then remains stuck in the system as psychic toxins (Bion, 1962), which take the form of traumatic repetitions (Freud, 1920). Hence, Frost, and Hoggett write, "The individual's response to suffering causes further suffering . . . this is why we call it 'double suffering'" (p. 449). Cheng (2001) similarly frames double loss as the consumption of racial injury, where the racialized subject is forced to take in the loss and then reidentify with the loss. Since the loss cannot be projected onto others, it consequently remains

entrenched within the self. Therefore, as Cheng (2001) states, "The racially melancholic minority is doubly versed in the art of losing" (p. 175). What these symbolizations of the "double" signify is that suffering is embodied by the racialized subject and becomes central to the survival of the subject within a white supremacist nation-state.

Within the context of education, Dumas (2014) also describes trauma as a type of doubling. He writes, "Marginalized groups suffer doubly in relation to schooling: First, the drudgery and futility of the school experience itself, and second, through the loss of hope for oneself individually, and for the group, collectively" (p. 8). It is important to highlight the idea of a collective loss of hope within a framework of suffering in schools. Pointing more specifically to the presence of resiliency in relation to the development of a double consciousness, racial melancholia's most important attribute for black student survival and progress in education is the *shared* histories of trauma that enable students to practice collective mourning. As Dumas (2014) identifies, "the key element in social suffering is a *group's* consciousness of its own pain, which inspires a collective imagination of a 'we' who suffer, a 'we' whose identity is under attack" (p. 6, italics in original). For black students that experience the trauma of schooling, collective mourning represents a communal effort to resist racism through material and psychic negotiations between mourning and melancholia.

Collective Mourning

The best illustration of collective mourning was exhibited by a trio of students who were all unified by a shared struggle to resist racism both inside and outside of Sumner High School. Although each of these students—Fredrick, Richard, and James—

identify themselves slightly differently along racial and ethnic lines, it was their double-conscious awareness of their blackness which unified them. James further explains:

> They [white people and police officers] don't see Fredrick [African American and white] as white, he's black; they don't see Richard [African American] as light-skinned, he's black; they don't see me [Cambodian and African American] as half Asian, I'm black. And that is the reality that we have to face and it kind of sucks when people don't get that. And I have to face the consequences. I don't even like *saying* the consequences. Like I can't walk outside without watching out for a cop. I have to turn my music down when I am in front of a cop, beside a cop, I see a cop three cars in front of me, I turn my music down. I shouldn't have to do that. (Interview, 2/13/15)

James shows a critical awareness of his blackness and how he and his friends are viewed through the eyes of whiteness.[26] This awareness was shared by all three students and represents "a group's consciousness of its own pain" mobilized as a unifying force, where the "we," the collective, jointly battled racism and "worked through" the various traumas they experienced.

The "double" trauma experienced in schools and the complexities of black suffering in general were mitigated through the solidarity forged by the relationship between Fredrick, Richard, and James. Their relationship was strengthened over the course of the four years they spent together in the AVID classroom as well as in other classes at Sumner. It is important to note that all three of them were honors students, they

[26] Although I use the concept of double consciousness to emphasize James' awareness, I want to also acknowledge the similarities present in relation to Fanon's (1967) notion of blackness as a "phobogenic object" that induces fear and anxiety in white people who gaze at black bodies. I believe James is aware of this corporeal reality as well.

chose to take the most rigorous courses Sumner had to offer, and they were highly active within the Sumner community, serving as leaders of various clubs and organizations within the school. However, in sharp contrast to their embrace of school culture was their incisive critique of how systems and institutions are racialized. For instance, on several different occasions, I observed each of these students reading and discussing books such as *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (Alexander, 2010) and *Between the World and Me* (Coates, 2015). Their informal literacy practices reflected an interest in learning about racism since their other classes (besides the AVID/IB class) did not incorporate racial topics into the curriculum. This type of learning can illuminate the ways in which those experiencing racial trauma make sense of how these traumas function and where they originate. Moglen (2005) labels this process a crucial part of learning to mourn *social injury*. He states, "As victims gain consciousness of the injuries they have endured (and their causes), the task of 'working through' will become, increasingly, the task of mourning" (p. 161). Reading about race, in part, did enable Fredrick, Richard, and James to gain a deeper understanding of how racism functions within society. For example, Fredrick talked eloquently about the impact of structural racism:

> Institutional racism is in a way parallel to covert racism in that you don't really notice it as much. Especially now since the laws have been in place for such a long time and as generations go on, we kind of just accept the laws that are in place when we were born and the laws we have grown up into. (Interview 3/4/15)

This sort of intellectual comprehension of race characterizes the level of understanding these three students exhibited concerning the deployment of racism. Fredrick's ability to

articulate how racism has been covertly inscribed into laws and institutions for generations shows a sophisticated grasp of racism that allowed for a deeper knowledge of his racially subordinate position in society. The act of raising critical consciousness, then, became a necessary aspect of learning to mourn racial loss as they attempted to comprehend the social structures that perpetuate their trauma.

In addition to their support for each other in reading about racism, Fredrick, Richard, and James dealt with the racial trauma produced from school violence and the hopelessness engendered by it in a collaborative manner. Their entrance into honors level courses at Sumner enhanced the traumas they experienced. These accelerated courses were traditionally reserved for white students, and as a result, black students in these classes were often subjected to racial microaggressions. A specific illustration of the support they provided each other was the protection methods they used to resist the racial transgressions from an honors level teacher that blatantly favored white students over students of color. During the first trimester of the course, each of them happened to be in separate classes. After enduring various racial incidents separately during the first trimester, they requested to be placed into the same class for the second trimester of the course. This request was granted and they were able to provide each other with emotional support and shield one another from the traumatic classroom experiences that hurt them. Fredrick, speaking about the class during an interview, said:

> "That teacher didn't like us at all, but it was easier to deal with it when we were all in the class together. We kind of like supported each other. I think we felt more comfortable in there too just knowing, like, "I got your back." (Interview 3/4/15).

What this bonding surrounding shared traumas represents is the social dimension of melancholia. The embodiment of racial injury is shifted from an individualized form of grief to a collective acknowledgement of similar racial wounds. These social bonds enabled opportunities for collective mourning through a communal process of support.

An added layer to Dumas' (2014) framework for black suffering in schools, in addition to a lack of upward mobility and hopelessness, was the uptick in public displays of police brutality against black, brown, and indigenous populations in the U.S. This racism was especially traumatic for Fredrick, Richard, and James because of the overt police violence committed against black males, including the murders of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Tamir Rice, occurred within the span of five months. These murders enhanced the racially melancholic trauma in the lives of these young black men. I asked Fredrick how he felt when witnessing racism in his life and he said:

> Depending on what it is. Sometimes things won't affect me really. It will kind of just fly over my head. I will notice it, but as far as my emotions, it won't really trigger anything. And then there are some times with people and it keeps happening; it will have an effect on you. So for instance, when Trayvon Martin [black teenager murdered in 2012] was killed, that was like I seen it and I was like that is kind of messed up. When it happened with Eric Garner and Michael Brown and then Tamir Rice, that is when I started taking it kind of hard. (Interview 3/14/15)

The deaths of these black males had an adverse effect on Fredrick, Richard, and James in their daily lives at school. It was difficult for them to find ways to process their grief in school since teachers did not discuss these issues in their classes. Within classroom

spaces at Sumner their attempts at mourning were inexpressible and prohibited. They were restricted to processing their grief at informal times, such as in the hallways and during lunch. The only formal classroom opportunity for expressing their grief was in the AVID/IB classroom.

Perhaps the most telling indication of the importance of the social bonds formed by this group of students was the instances where their support for one another was absent. Within the AVID/IB classroom there was one such example of a particular student confronting racism without the support of the other two. This example involved Richard and Nick's argument over how much racial progress had been achieved by the U.S. since the 1930s in which I provided a detailed analysis of in chapter 4. In the moment where Richard felt the most melancholic during this encounter, when Mr. Turner's body moved toward Nick and in the process validated Nick's racist perspective, he also felt pain and hopelessness. Typically, during the moments when racial melancholia was enhanced, Fredrick and James would be there for Richard to offer support and encouragement. Instead, Richard put his head on his desk for the rest of the class period until Mr. Turner and I approached him to see how he was feeling. His appearance of despair and his reference to the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown as contributing to his hopelessness became an instance of inexpressible mourning. Richard desperately lamented, "This keeps happening again and again, and again [referring to black males being shot by police officers]. I don't know what to do. I feel hopeless" (Fieldnotes, 2/23/15). The intensity of Richard's feelings was directly related to the absence of Fredrick and Richard during the encounter. When interviewing

Richard, I asked him specifically about his emotions during the incident with him and Nick. He explained:

> You know at that moment I would think, I usually like, me and James and Fredrick, we usually talk to each other about certain things that happen. I don't think they were there at the time so I didn't really get a chance to do that. I didn't really get a chance to, I guess, talk about it, so I guess that's another reason why I kind of expressed so much anger to you and Mr. Turner. Because I couldn't express it to Fredrick and James. So it was a combination of, you know, what Nick was saying and, you know, my personal experiences with my friends. It was just annoying. (Interview, 4/22/15)

Richard relied on Fredrick and James' support to be able to persevere during particularly melancholic moments. In this instance, without their support, he was unable to "work through" the trauma he was experiencing. Richard's ability to cope with his racial grief became tied to Fredrick, James, and their collective processes of resistance.

The social bonds forged by Fredrick, Richard, and James demonstrate the non-pathological core of racial melancholia. This form of collective resistance can be framed as a critical anti-racist intervention that functions on a psycho-social level where social connections can lead toward psychic opportunities for mourning racial injury through what Eng and Han (2000) refer to as "psychic citizenship." They further explain:

> Indeed, it is our belief that the refusal to view identities under social erasure as individual pathology and permanent damage lies in the communal appropriation of melancholia, it refunctioning as a structure of everyday life that annuls the

> multitude of losses an unforgiving social world continually demands. (Eng & Han, 2000, p. 697)

The shift toward recognizing that communal efforts to resist racism and cope with racial trauma serves to develop fluid negotiations between mourning and melancholia that create the possibilities for social change. Reframing melancholia as a productive process for engaging with racial loss enables social groups to coalesce around the shared historical traumas that continue to plague the present, a process that can lead to future social transformation.

Conclusion: Losing Arms and Enlivening Morbidity

In the introduction to Dumas' (2014) study on black suffering in schools, he references a passage from Octavia Butler's (2004) science fiction time-travel novel, *Kindred*. The main character, Dana Franklin, a young black woman, is transported back in time from present-day Los Angles to pre-Civil War Maryland, where she has to protect Rufus Weylin, one of her abusive, slave-owning white ancestors. She is summoned back in time whenever Rufus' life is in danger and she is forced to make sure that he lives in order to ensure her own existence in the present. During one of these trips back into time, Dana loses her left arm as Rufus holds her down in an attempt to rape her. When she returns to the present her severed arm is forever left in the past with Rufus. Dumas (2014) uses this example as a metaphorical illustration of the connection between the history of white supremacist education policy that has created deeply ingrained structural inequalities for black youth in schools and the unmeasurable social loss that has transpired as a result of these policies. Just like Dana losing an arm in the past yet still

surviving in the present, "(t)here is no way for black people to have survived education policy and practice in the past several decades and not have lost something" (Dumas, 2014, p. 25). How, then, do black students make sense of past losses that are felt in the present? Are these melancholic traces of death able to be mourned within schools, the very same social structures that perpetuate racial loss?

The imagery of severed arms is also used by both Leader (2008) and Cheng (2001) as symbolic illustrations of loss in the context of mourning and melancholia. Leader (2008) shares the story of a woman attempting to commit suicide by lying on train tracks. The suicide attempt failed, but in the process, the train severed the woman's arm from her body. The woman proceeded to carry her arm with her to a neighboring bridge where she ultimately ended her life. Why did she feel the need to carry her severed arm with her before taking her own life if she knew she was going to die anyway? Leader (2008) uses this story to show, through symbolic means, how melancholia requires us to hold on to the lost object, even in death. Leader (2008) writes, "The arm was another part of her image of herself, and so each loss—the person and the arm—was refused by her. She kept the arm, then, for the very same reason she committed suicide" (p. 196).

The severed arm is an illustration of the living remaining with the dead because the woman could not relinquish her arm— she felt that the "dead" arm was still a part of her. The woman's efforts to retrieve her arm, to some, would indicate a grasp for life; why bother obtaining the arm if the goal was death anyway? However, she could not bear being separated from a part of herself. This is symbolic of the complex process of mourning that must also include melancholia since the woman could not properly "rest" without obtaining the "dead" part of her. She needed to reembrace loss before she could

perish. Although this example represents a severe case of clinical depression which is not necessarily characteristic of racial melancholia, it does enable us to theorize how the dead remain with the living as the severed arm shows how we attach ourselves to loss instead of surrendering it.

Cheng's (2001) allusion to a severed arm deals more specifically with the concept of collective mourning that has been a central issue of this chapter. In the introduction to the English translation of Abraham and Torok's (1994) *The Shell and the Kernel*, Nicolas Rand identifies an example of collective mourning from literature, which he believes demonstrates a successful attempt at mourning using Abraham and Torok's theory of introjection. The short story that he references and that Cheng (2001) cites is called *At Sea* by Guy de Maupassant, which follows two brothers lost at sea. The younger brother develops a serious case of gangrene that requires that his arm be amputated. At first, the brother was reluctant to have his arm cut off, but after several different crew members attempt to heal the gangrene through various methods to no avail, with the help of his older brother he cuts off his arm. The story ends with the entire crew of the ship participating in a funeral for the detached arm where a procession was led by the brothers with the arm encased in a miniature coffin and laid to rest. Cheng's analysis of the story differs from Rand's in that Rand believed the conclusion of the story—the arm being laid to rest—represented a successful process of mourning, a relinquishment of the lost object (i.e. the severed arm), whereas Cheng argues that the process which leads to the younger brother severing his arm was more illustrative of the ways in which melancholia becomes a necessary aspect of communal mourning. The success of the mourning process, according to Cheng, was not because the brother was able to let the arm go, but instead, it

was because he worked *not* to abandon the arm. Hence, Cheng (2001) writes, "The final mourning was in fact *enabled* by the young man's melancholia" (p. 98, italics in original). The communal feature of this story is the entire crew's participation in attempting to save the arm and then subsequently laying the arm to rest. According to Cheng, the arm became a source of celebration and unity for the entire community.

The collective imagery of the severing of arms that these examples depict highlights the complex negotiation between mourning and melancholia. There is nothing simple about how racial grief is processed and how racial trauma is endured. Nevertheless, attempting to translate the productive aspects of mourning and melancholia into generative possibilities for transformative teaching and learning is a worthwhile enterprise considering the permanence of racism in America. To what extent can classroom space become a site for collective mourning for black students? Answering this question requires us to take a closer look at the deep connections between the lost object and the grieving subject. The racially oppressed share an intense attachment to racial loss; at times these losses are nebulous and at other times they become clearer. Cheng (2001) labels the process of communal mourning that the crew members used to commemorate the brother's severed arm as a method for "enlivening morbidity" (p. 99). Cheng uses this imagery to convey how an ethnic community may imagine reidentifying with lost objects in a productive manner. She further explains:

> "the restaging of the self as the object of morbidity duplicates the very preconditions of that community's grief—a repetition that, while disabling, is also highly seductive as a strange stand-in for a community jeopardized by diluted and disappearing origins." (Cheng, 2001, p. 100)

The conception of enlivening morbidity involves bringing the dead back to life in dynamic ways where the past becomes a living part of the present. This process would resemble Dana Franklin reclaiming her lost arm in the past and returning it to the present. The process helps to clarify the reason the suicidal woman felt compelled to carry her severed arm with her to death. Enlivening morbidity defines the practice of reidentifying with past losses and recognizing these losses as also being a part of the self—a connectivity with the past that merges historical traumas with racial grief in the present.

When imagining classroom space, "the restaging of the self as the object of morbidity" becomes an improbable scenario in the literalized sense of the phrase. However, thinking metaphorically, how can schools forge a community similar to the crew members in Maupassant's short story? A framework for enlivening morbidity in education must, first and foremost, find ways to symbolize the history of racial violence in America as a means for better understanding the sources of racial trauma in the present. This form of symbolization would involve constructing curriculum and employing pedagogies centered on raising critical consciousness. The importance of this type of emancipatory education is reinforced by Moglen's (2005) theory of mourning social injury. He states:

> For those that are experiencing social processes as traumas, the psychic task of 'working through' must involve not only the painful therapeutic project of raising their injuries to consciousness—but also the work of developing explanatory social narratives that will make the ongoing causes of suffering cognitively intelligible. (Moglen, 2005, p. 161)

Raising critical consciousness is certainly not a new theory in critical approaches to education; indeed, culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), critical pedagogy (Kincheloe, 2004), critical race theory in education (Ladson-Billings, 1998) and social justice education (Hackman, 2005) are all rooted in this type of liberatory educational practice. However, rarely are these education theories positioned within the realm of the development of psycho-social approaches to mourning racial injury and "working through" racial trauma.

In this chapter I theorized how black students at Sumner High School negotiated mourning and melancholia in relation to school and community traumas present in their life. In closing, I hesitate to frame the AVID/IB classroom as a site for collective black mourning. Even though this classroom was often the only public space within the school where black students could discuss race openly, attempt to make sense of the police brutality occurring across the nation, and learn about portions of America's history of racial violence, there were still other factors preventing instances for collective mourning. For example, imagining the entire AVID/IB classroom as members of the crew in *At Sea*, the ending of the story would find the community disunited. If the severed arm, for instance, represented the scope of racial losses enacted through white supremacist violence, many crew members would deny the presence of an arm afflicted by gangrene in the first place. While others would recognize the arm is diseased, but not care about the health of the person the arm is attached to. Still, others would seek to save the arm and then attend the funeral when it was lost. This comparison only raises more questions about the nature of mourning and melancholia within classroom space, the most important question being this: How do we enable collective mourning based on shared

racial traumas when we are teaching in multiracial classrooms? Perhaps the answer is that we cannot create such a space. Maybe the perfect classroom space is not the goal after all. Similar to our need for both mourning and melancholia to survive and resist on a psycho-social level, perhaps we need a classroom space where fluid negotiations between mourning and melancholia structure the ways in which students of all races "work through" racial trauma.

Chapter 7

"It was Like Jumping into a Freezing Lake": Pedagogical and Curricular Racial Awakenings

BRRRRRRRIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIINNG! An alarm clock clanged in the dark and silent room. A bed spring creaked. A woman's voice sang out impatiently: "Bigger, shut that thing off!" (Wright, 1940, p. 1)

Introduction

The opening sentences of *Native Son* (1940) depict an alarm clock blaring in the tiny one-room apartment that Bigger Thomas, the novel's young black male protagonist, shares with his family in 1930s Black Belt Chicago.[27] The book's visceral depictions of racial violence in urban Chicago shocked many readers at the time of its release. Richard Wright's decision to begin with the sound of an alarm served as a symbolic indication for the novel's audience to awaken. Tuhkanen (2010) explains this symbolism:

> While within the narrative the alarm stirs the members of the Thomas household to the sustained nightmare of their impoverished lives, its extradiegetic function is to force the novel's readers to readjust their sense of time and reality. A rude awakening, it cautions its audience—particularly white America—to catch up with the realities of how race is still lived in the nation, some eighty years after the national nightmare of racial bondage is supposed to have ended. (p 151)

[27] The Black Belt was a located on the south side of Chicago where three quarters of the black population lived due to racial segregation.

In present day, many are still needing to "catch up with the realities" of racial violence inflicted upon communities of color who are forced to endure the reprehensible system of white supremacy. In some ways American society is still dreaming, as people co-exist in their "racial fantasylands" (Mills, 1997), where the horrors of racism are relegated to a dimension unknown, while others live in a waking nightmare, a reality where the blaring alarm cannot be turned off, a constant reminder of the anxiety-producing world of white terrorism.

The symbolism of the alarm clock in *Native Son* (1940) is an apt comparison to the function of the novel as a curricular tool for raising critical consciousness in the AVID/IB classroom. The class' reading of the novel acted as a narrativized alarm for some students who awakened from their racial fantasies and began to recognize the violent nature of American society after reading and discussing the text. Mr. Turner's motivations for teaching the book were to expose the hidden racial atrocities that are not often discussed within school spaces. The narrative embodied characteristics of the racially melancholic nation-state through the unmasking of racial violence that is so often repressed, distorted, and expunged from historical memory. It represented a curricular theory that enabled a deeper understanding of the nation's racial wounds, a device that helped students to identify with lost objects. As a result of its explicit portrayal of racism, the book became a catalyst for some of the most important race dialogues that occurred in the class.

While *Native Son* (1940) served as a curricular model to educate students about the realities of racial violence in America, there was also a need for the incorporation of pedagogical methods to teach the novel in a meaningful way. This is where Mr. Turner's

"awakening" is important to elucidate in relation to *Native Son* (1940) because without critical pedagogical applications of the prescient themes in the text, the book would not have been as effective in increasing the racial literacies of students in the class. Mr. Turner, in my estimation, was an experienced critical pedagogue who was willing to have conversations about race in the classroom even if it made him or his students feel uncomfortable. In fact, his description of his discomfort during race dialogues speaks pivotally to both the courage teachers need in order to talk about traumatic subjects and Mr. Turner's own growth as a critical pedagogue. When I asked him if he ever felt nervous or anxious when discussing race in the classroom he stated:

> I used to . . . It was a thing that I had to, like, force myself to do. It was like jumping into a freezing lake, where you know that initial plunge is going to knock the wind out of you and you are just mentally preparing yourself for that, but the more you are in there you get used to it right? So I would say now—and I think some of it comes with the confidence of being a teacher—like, I am more confident in who I am and what I am doing. (Interview, 4/12/15)

Mr. Turner's metaphorical description of feeling uncomfortable during race dialogues referenced the uneasy anticipation one feels before jumping into cold water. Mr. Turner jumped into the freezing lake each time he stepped foot into the classroom to have conversations about race with his students. Over time, he became more confident that he could manage this chilling plunge.

Mr. Turner's pedagogical "awakening" is represented through the imagery of jumping into a freezing lake. There is an affective force at work when Mr. Turner hits the water as he places race at the center of his pedagogy. The body undergoes a rush of

feeling at the moment of contact that increases one's heartrate and puts a painful exertion of stress on the senses. The shock of the plunge alerts the body to feel in an amplified way when the surface of the water is broken, similar to Ahmed's (2004a) example of the painful reaction to stubbing one's toe I discussed in chapter 3. However painful the dive may be, the anticipation of the pain often prevents teachers from ever jumping at all. Mr. Turner's "awakening" was the decision he made to force himself to jump into the lake despite the shock he knew he would feel. He understood that it was vital to have critical race dialogues in order to engender social change and that this move toward anti-racism would be discomforting, but nonetheless necessary.

This concluding chapter examines the "awakenings" that I referenced above in both Mr. Turner's pedagogy and the class' reading of *Native Son* (1940). I argue that when jointly analyzed, these pedagogical and curricular "awakenings" were the fundamental reason students in the class learned about race in America. I first consider how Mr. Turner's internal and external struggles to teach about racial issues in the classroom were a form of "difficult knowledge" (Britzman, 2009) that he had to work through before he could employ critical pedagogies in the classroom. Next, I analyze how the class' reading of *Native Son* (1940) enabled students to comprehend the realities of racism in contemporary American society. I then comment on future directions for the study of trauma in critical research on education. Finally, I share concluding remarks concerning raising critical consciousness versus engaging in critical anti-racist actions in the context of the AVID/IB classroom.

Positioning a chapter about "awakenings" at the end of this dissertation may seem somewhat out of place since this imagery tends to connote beginnings. However, I hope

this chapter serves as a "new beginning" and a call to action for researchers and educators. The previous chapters analyzed the various conflicts and struggles endured by Mr. Turner and the AVID/IB students when teaching and learning about race both inside and outside of the classroom. This chapter serves to highlight the productive aspects of curriculum and pedagogy that increased racial literacies. With the ringing alarm clock and the dive into the icy lake in mind, I illustrate the importance of engaging in traumatic learning and embracing racial melancholia as a method for engendering social change.

Mr. Turner's Encounters with Difficult Knowledge

Jumping into the Freezing Lake

The image of Mr. Turner jumping into a freezing lake when discussing race in the classroom represents the concept of "difficult knowledge" (Britzman, 2009). As discussed in chapter 2, difficult knowledge embodies the traumatic context of teaching and learning, including the unconscious desires and internalized resistance that characterize encounters with racial trauma. For instance, when Mr. Turner discusses issues of race in the classroom, he is confronting a traumatic subject with centuries of violence that is evoked through this discourse. He must face the haunting presence of racism. This is an encounter that forces Mr. Turner to confront both the shameful history of the nation-state and his own white shame at the center of his subjectivity. The force of his body hitting the surface of the water represents what I call a "melancholic affect"[28] where the affective environment becomes saturated by the racially melancholic core of

[28] I discussed melancholic affects in chapter 4 in the context of Mr. Turner, Nick, and Richard's discussion of racial progress.

the nation-state. It is a psycho-social production of racial trauma, a reopening of the nation's racial wounds.

When the learner (or pedagogue) encounters difficult knowledge, such as Mr. Turner's critical race dialogues, the affective intensity is described by Simon (2011) as a "shock to thought." Simon (2011) writes that this form of trauma is often conjured through the viewing of images of racial violence and death; he references an example of a museum exhibition presenting photographs of lynching in America as a provocation of difficult knowledge. Simon (2011) describes the psycho-social aspect of this form of difficult knowledge as "a disruptive affective force [that] may be provoked by the sight of deadly violence, intensified not only by identifications bolstered by existing sets of social relationships, but, as well, unresolved psychic conflicts from one's own past" (p. 434). Considering Mr. Turner's willingness to confront the nation's racially melancholic past and also taking into account his own racially melancholic subjectivity, does not mean that he needs to be staring directly at death (as the lynching photographs illustrate) to feel the affective force of racial violence. This violence is a psychic translation of trauma—past racial ghosts comingling with the present—that makes itself known through the pedagogical transference of knowledge. His "shock to thought" is racial melancholia.

The critical application of a "shock to thought" in the context of pedagogy is the conflict at the center of teaching about racism in the classroom: that this trauma often prevents teachers from jumping into the freezing lake. The anxiety and apprehension produced by even thinking about confronting racial issues in the classroom can be emotionally paralyzing. This conflict is representative of difficult knowledge and characterizes "the limits of education" (Britzman, 2010, p. 244) where painful resistance

stifles critical pedagogy. Britzman (2010) further describes this uncertainty: "With resistance, desire is held in suspense. The self is caught between wishes for goodness and the terror of mistakes" (p. 244). Mr. Turner's early attempts at facilitating critical race dialogues in the classroom reflected this type of resistance. He said:

> I remember, I used to, in the first couple of years of doing this, I would literally, my hands would start to sweat before the class. Like, I knew if I was going to be bringing this up, I would think about the lesson really carefully beforehand and try to like pre-script answers to questions that I thought might pop up. (Interview, 4/12/15)

His "pre-scripting" of answers to imaginary questions speaks to the "terror of mistakes" that reinforces the paralysis teachers can feel, as they are often just as afraid for their students to encounter trauma as they are to teach about it themselves. (I am not saying pre-scripted answers are necessarily a bad pedagogical practice, just that it demonstrates the fear of making a mistake.) The "suspense" is the fear and the uncertainty that pedagogues feel before leaping into the lake. Standing on the dock peering into the water, one may think of how cold the water will be when they hit the surface, the anticipation of feeling the pain, the sweaty palms, it is a paralyzing emotion. Many decide that the risk is too great; something could go wrong. Or some may jump once and decide that it was too painful to ever jump again.

Mr. Turner did make this leap, numerous times in fact. How did the "wishes for goodness" outweigh the "terror of mistakes" to embolden Mr. Turner to continue to take the plunge? This is also a central question for Simon (2011) as he contemplates how one can productively encounter racial violence: "If the [lynching] photographs were felt as a

'shock to thought', on what terms might such a shock be conceived as a force that compels thought rather than a traumatic disruption that leads to the extended abandonment of thought?" (p. 439). I asked Mr. Turner what shaped his willingness to continue to have race conversations and after pondering the question for a moment he responded:

> The fundamental reason, right, is education can be a way—and it sounds cliché—but education can be a way to create change. And I was really attracted to that, thinking about education wasn't about the subject as English, that is not where I saw my role as an educator, but the conversations that have surrounded social justice and race, have fit nicely into my initial desire to create change. It's not like *Freedom Writers*[29] "white educator saves people of color" type of thing. It's more like, what role do I see education playing in the world? (Interview, 4/12/15)

Although, as Britzman (2010) notes, "resistance, after all, does not come with directions as to how it can be handled" (p. 246), Mr. Turner's motivations for jumping into the lake seemed to be fueled by an intense desire to elicit social change. He did not view education or the subject of English as just the teaching of literacy; he believed that education had the ability to transform the world. The fact that he referenced his self-awareness of not becoming a "white savior" is important to mention as well. His desire for social change was not intertwined with the idea that discussing racism in the classroom was only for the purposes of personal gratification, which scholars have identified as a commonplace feature of white superficial race talk (Ahmed, 2004b; Bell & Hartmann, 2007). He learned to embrace difficult knowledge because he believed it

[29] A film that perpetuates the narrative of the teacher as white savior who appears at the "ghetto" school and magically rescues racial minorities from all their pathologies.

would create the necessary opportunities for social change to occur. This grasp of the importance of conducting critical race dialogues represents Mr. Turner's pedagogical "awakening."

Mr. Turner's pedagogy did not take place in isolation, as teaching and learning is an active social process. The students in the class are an essential part of the equation; therefore, it is also important to consider the psycho-social history of the AVID/IB class in the context of Mr. Turner's pedagogy. Ellsworth (1989) notes that often studies concerning critical pedagogy place teachers at the center of raising critical consciousness without understanding "historical context, personal biography, and subjectivities split between the conscious and unconscious" (p. 312) of the various intersecting student identities in the classroom. To some extent, this study has been mindful of these particularities, and Mr. Turner is also aware of some of these aspects of identity. For example, he specifically referenced the historical context of the class as an additional reason he was able to obtain the confidence to have race conversations:

> I do have to say though, it still does make me nervous to some degree. I can't say that I am absolutely confident in this because it gets to the fundamentals of the way people see the world and it's no longer, what do you think about this story? It's like, how do you as an individual see the world that you are experiencing? I would say that there wasn't a moment, but I would say that I had to, like, I think working with the AVID students have changed that. And what I mean by that is because they are coming in with a critical framework, in some ways it's easier. In many ways in 9th and 10th grade you had to break down walls that I take for granted now [referencing my time as their past AVID teacher]. It's different than

> a regular 9 course that I am starting from scratch. When we changed this curriculum, the focus shifted and it became so much more of an embedded topic and an embedded structure for the way we delivered an understanding of the content that that's where that came from. So if I were to pinpoint how I became more comfortable, that is why. (Interview, 4/12/15)

His response indicated that having race conversations was never easy for him since he still felt anxiety no matter how many times he jumped into the lake. However, for Mr. Turner, the "embedded curriculum" and the "breaking down" of walls in 9th and 10th grade was influential in the confidence he gained when teaching about race in the AVID/IB classroom.

In particular, regarding the "breaking down" of walls, student exposure to race conversations had been taking place since they were in 9th grade. As I outlined in chapter 1, as a part of the AVID program students experienced a series of courses designed to foster dialogue about various social issues, including issues of race. Often students who were seen as more open-minded in Mr. Turner's classroom struggled to learn about racism when they were in my 9th and 10th grade AVID classes. For instance, several students discussed how close-minded they were when reflecting on race topics we discussed earlier in their high school careers. One white student, Carol, commented to me:

> I recall a lot of the things that you were teaching us specifically in terms of gender and race in which I was like, "Oh it's all so silly, it's all so silly." And now that I think back to now, I'm like, I would punch myself in the face for thinking that way. (Fieldnotes, 1/20/15)

Another white student, Anna (who I discussed in chapter 5), also reflected on her feelings when learning about race in my class:

> A: When you were trying to explain why the n-word was so bad and the difference between [the n-word with] "er" and "a," in my head I was just like, "No, Mr. Grinage. You don't get it, [n-word with] 'a' just means that's just your friend when you say that." I don't know, I was trying to say that in my head to you like, "No you don't get it, you're wrong."
>
> JG: I know you, Anna. You would never come out and say, "You're wrong." That's not like you, but you were thinking it?
>
> A: Yeah I was like, "No that just means that's your friend," but I've now started—two of my friends use that word [n-word with "a"]—I asked them to stop using that word. I verbally say, "Please don't say that." I used to say it and I stopped saying it. (Interview, 3/5/15)

These examples demonstrate the "breaking down" of walls Mr. Turner spoke of in relation to his confidence as a teacher discussing race in the AVID/IB classroom. For some students,[30] prolonged engagement with race topics did improve their racial literacies and their open-mindedness. And, at least in the case of Anna, this learning translated into anti-racist actions because of Anna's interventions when admonishing her friends for using the n-word. What these student comments also demonstrate is a sort of longitudinal "alter-accomplishment" (Massumi, 2015) that disrupted hegemonic

[30] But certainly not all since many students were resistant to learning about race in both my past AVID classes and in Mr. Turner's class.

formations of racism over time through a sustained pedagogical commitment to teaching and learning about race in the classroom. The alter-accomplishment at work here is the repeated "priming" (Massumi, 2015) of one's affective and emotional conflicts with racial trauma over the course of numerous race dialogues spanning several years. In other words, this "priming" positioned students as experienced in discussing race in the classroom. Mr. Turner's classroom was not the first time students confronted difficult knowledge together; they had taken the plunge into the freezing lake long before.

Wading in the (Pedagogical) Waters

The critical study of white emotionality, according to Matias and Allen (2013), calls for a deconstruction of white normative expressions of feeling. It demands an interrogation of the structures of feeling that reinforce white dominance and uphold racist ideologies. With this theory of emotion in mind, some may say that Mr. Turner's enthusiasm for repeatedly jumping into freezing lakes is a form of self-harm where one is committing violence against oneself. Why would anyone subject themselves to this pain? But, on the contrary, jumping into the lake signifies a type of "humanizing violence" that disrupts the tendency for white teachers to remain silent about issues of race in the classroom (Leonardo & Porter, 2010). The white normative emotional scenario would be for the teacher to peer into the water, fearful of the consequences of leaping from the dock. Remaining outside of the water maintains one's allegiance to whiteness and reinscribes white emotionality, preventing opportunities for anti-racism. Matias and Allen (2013) write, "Whites are fearful of the impending pain of rejecting whiteness, as if, somehow, the feelings of discomfort are incompatible with love. A more humanizing

love embraces painful feelings" (p. 301). Thus, rather than a form of self-harm, Mr. Turner's pedagogical focus on critical race dialogue was an action that broke the normative racial chains that often entrap white teachers into silence.

Jumping into a freezing lake is one thing, but what happens when wading in the water after the dive? Mr. Turner was moving toward a more humanizing pedagogy, but that does not mean it was not fraught with obstacles preventing sustained conversations that sometimes made learning difficult. Acknowledging these inherent struggles, Mr. Turner and I discussed his perceptions of what constituted a successful race dialogue:

> JG: What kinds of things do you look for to indicate if one of these race discussions goes well or is unsuccessful? What do you look for?
>
> T: I think that things are successful when we talk about race when I can sense tension, and I can feel tension, and I can see people sit up, and I can still see people kind of looking around. I start feeling tense as it were. And the reason why I think that's successful is because that is where real learning occurs, right? Like in that space we've created this spot where people are not determined to say the right thing or fit in with what is a pre-identified acceptable ideology. That's where I feel that it's successful and we can have those conversations. So I don't know if that's quantifiable—it's more like a feeling. Like, it feels like we're getting somewhere and it feels like people are challenged. It feels like I need to put out fires, but I kind of like that, you know? I like that because I know that people are actually voicing what they think. Because my fear would be that if we kept it on the surface and we always danced around the circle and got along, having our

> kumbaya moment, that's not doing shit, right? And so I feel like it's successful when there is discomfort.

Mr. Turner's response illustrates the role of affect and emotion in the context of critical race dialogue. His awareness of tension and his embrace of discomfort positions his teaching as a type of "pedagogy of discomfort" (Boler, 1999) as I previously discussed in chapter 4, where pedagogues commit themselves to encountering traumatic forms of learning in pursuit of social change. When Mr. Turner refers to this form of tension as not fitting into the "pre-identified acceptable ideology" he is speaking of normative responses to critical race dialogues where the learner resists difficult racial knowledge. This disciplined emotional response prevents sustained race discussions because both the teacher and students are reluctant to encounter trauma. Employing a "pedagogy of discomfort" in classroom spaces requires an affective and emotional environment that goes beyond surface-level race conversations, one where students are not only jumping into the freezing lake but also wading in the water, prolonging engagement with traumatic subjects.

The challenge of employing a "pedagogy of discomfort" is that when students encounter traumatic forms of learning such as discussing racism and racial violence, they must also endure a "shock to thought." This obstacle can be difficult to overcome for the critical pedagogue because the learner may not be able to "work through" the encounter with trauma—they may resort to using (conscious or unconscious) normative tactics of avoidance, denial, and/or resistance. Britzman (1998) cautions that when difficult knowledge and pedagogy converge, the pedagogue must take care to craft pedagogical strategies that enable students to engage in traumatic learning. Mr. Turner's pedagogical

self-reflexivity was very much attuned to the craft of facilitating race conversations. For instance, he discussed his own struggles with anxiety during such dialogues and how he responded to students during these conversations:

> It is a definite, definite challenge for me to remain calm. In particular, when I hear something that doesn't fit with the way that I want the lesson to go. Or with the way I see the world, you know? But I always go back to if I respond with indignation or sarcasm or anger or whatever I just shut that door. Like I shut it and I locked it. And so my emotions are constantly being evaluated from a metacognitive level. Not always successfully, but I have to check myself a lot in these conversations. Like check, check. I always have to try to take deep breaths, look around the classroom when somebody says something that I find would be particularly alarming or whatever that happens to be. And so my emotions definitely come into play and are definitely a challenge to me. I have to make sure that I'm able to trust my language, and trust my emotion particularly, during these times. (Interview, 3/5/15)

His mention of the "metacognitive" awareness of his emotions and the internal practices he participates in to stay calm signals a developed sense of self-reflection. Boler (1999) contends that an effective pedagogy of discomfort must develop *genealogies* of self-reflexivity that go beyond superficial forms of self-reflection. A genealogy of self underscores how the pedagogue functions in relation to others as well as a self-awareness of "the personal and cultural histories and material conditions" of these relations (Boler, 1999, p. 178). Although I demonstrated Mr. Turner's rigorous drive to practice self-reflexivity in chapter 4, here I add that the above response is indicative of his internal

processes of emotional self-regulation used during particularly traumatic classroom moments (even though, also in chapter 4, I illustrated a moment when this failed him, which characterizes the complexities of classroom race talk). His pedagogical strategy of responding with dignity and respect to viewpoints that he may not personally agree with highlights his commitment to self-reflection and the carefully crafted pedagogical maneuvers he makes in pursuit of critical teaching. One Asian American student, Brian, commented:

> I feel comfortable discussing race because I like how Mr. Turner teaches. He, like, he respects you. He doesn't make you feel like you gave a stupid answer like other teachers do—he lets you, kind of like, express yourself more. (Interview, 2/12/15)

This type of pedagogy made it possible for both Mr. Turner and his students to jump into the freezing lake and wade in the water *together* as they explored the realities of race in America.

Native Son: The Racially Melancholic Novel

The role of curriculum plays a large part in the development of effective critical pedagogy that addresses the complex issues of race in America. The AVID/IB class reading of *Native Son* (1940) enabled Mr. Turner and his students to connect past acts of racial violence during the height of Jim Crow with the present existence of racial violence in contemporary America. Opportunities for this type of learning were achieved because of the narrative structure of the novel. *Native Son* (1940) is a *trauma novel*, which Balaev (2008) defines as "a work of fiction that conveys profound loss or intense fear on

individual or collective levels" (p. 150). The novel certainly fits this definition as Bigger Thomas directly confronts his fears through Wright's visceral depictions of Bigger's conflicts with white supremacy, a system that has trapped him because of the color of his skin. Balaev (2008) goes on to write:

> A defining feature of the trauma novel is the transformation of self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perception of the self and world. (p. 150)

This description is also true of Bigger as he endured a series of horrible and disturbing experiences that ranged from chauffeuring his rich white employer's daughter, Mary, and her boyfriend, Jan, around town, frightened to even be in the presence of white people, to the unfortunate circumstances that lead to Bigger's accidental murder of Mary that same night. These events led Bigger to flee for his life, evading law enforcement until he is ultimately captured. Bigger spends almost the entire novel in complete terror of the presence of white supremacy. In the end, he finally comes to terms with the inevitable fate of his blackness which succumbs to a system that was rigged in the first place. Bigger's fate was already sealed—he had no chance at escaping whiteness.

The trauma of Bigger's experiences in the novel resemble the stories told by Du Bois (1995) and Lorde (1984) that I referenced in chapter 2, where racism is transmitted through affective encounters. Similar to Du Bois' meeting with his white classmate who refused to trade cards with him and, with a simple dehumanizing glance, communicated that his skin color was a problem, and Lorde's realization that a white woman sitting next to her on the train was horrified by even touching Lorde's arm, Bigger felt the sting of

white supremacy. For example, when Mary and Jan insist that Bigger bring them to the restaurant on the black side of town, he is scared to eat with white people as his friends stare strangely at him. Wright (1940) states, "When he tried to chew he found his mouth dry. It seemed that the very organic functions of his body had altered" (p. 84). This racialized affective tension escalates throughout the novel as Bigger is put into situations where circumstances force him to confront whiteness. Throughout the novel, Bigger becomes more aware of his predicament as a result of the various transgressions that amounted to his capture. This problem involved Bigger's attempts at gaining access to opportunities to escape his impoverished life thwarted at every turn by whiteness. Bigger becomes progressively more aware of this dilemma, as each attempt at correcting the previous wrongdoing only makes things worse and his life spirals out of control. As a result of his increased awareness of being trapped by whiteness, he exhibits intense feelings of melancholia.

The reader witnesses Bigger's downfall in a way that clearly expresses the trauma at the center of black subjectivity, created by the inescapable reality of whiteness. This distinct portrayal of racial trauma not only makes *Native Son* (1940) a "trauma novel," but the book also acts as a "racially melancholic" novel. The novel's tone, structure, and characters certainly speak to the specific features of the trauma novel, but more importantly for students in the AVID/IB class, it created opportunities to comprehend racial loss. The book's explicit depiction of racial violence compelled students to experience a "shock to thought" through their reading of the text. Following Mr. Turner's pedagogical assertion that students must feel uncomfortable in order for learning to occur, the book often conjured these types of discomforting emotions due to the violent

imagery. Mr. Turner justified his teaching of the book when I asked him if it was too violent: "I admit, the book is really violent. But let's face it, it's not any more violent than turning on the evening news or going online and watching Eric Garner get choked to death" (field notes, 2/11/15). His point demonstrates the novel's ability to connect with the AVID/IB students who were trying to process and understand the public displays of racial violence occurring in society such as the murder of Eric Garner.

Many black students were particularly affected by reading the text because their perception of the constant threat of police violence in their own lives resembled the racial fear that Bigger expresses throughout the novel. For instance, James said during a discussion about Bigger's accidental murder of Mary, "The scary thing is that I could be Bigger" (Fieldnotes, 2/12/15). James was able to identify with the characterization of Bigger because of the shared racial suffering that constitutes transgenerational racial trauma. His melancholic identity was constructed through racial trauma and loss which represents a genealogy of black pain. Balaev (2008) writes, "a person's contemporary identity can be 'vicariously traumatized' by reading about a historical narrative" (p. 152). This "vicarious trauma" opened up spaces for the socialization of racial ghosts which found James connecting past racial traumas with traumas in the present. This is a stark example of a reidentification with racial loss that forms one's ability to "work through" trauma. James' realization that he could become ensnared in the grips of whiteness, just like Bigger, highlights another feature of the trauma novel. Balaev (2008) states, "the trauma novel provides a picture of the individual that suffers, but paints it in such a way as to suggest that this protagonist is an 'everyperson' figure" (p. 155). Here, the racially

melancholic trauma novel illuminated the shared experience of trauma that James was able to identify as similar to Bigger's fears surrounding whiteness.

White students also exhibited strong reactions to reading *Native Son* (1940). One example was Anna's response to walking through the hallways at Sumner and thinking about the book. She said:

> I vividly remember when we got done with AVID [after a class discussion concerning Bigger's accidental murder of Mary] I was walking down past the hallway by the blue lockers and I remember looking at someone who is a person of color and making eye contact: "I wonder if they see me how Bigger saw Mary?" And I was looking at that and I was like "Whoa." I started thinking about race more after that and how people of color, like, react or feel about white people. (Interview, 3/5/15)

Anna was becoming more aware of her whiteness in relation to the person of color with whom she made eye contact. She was able to understand, in that moment, the interpersonal transmission of racial trauma generated by histories of racism. This realization underscores the trauma novel's ability to help us reconsider "the claim that trauma is unspeakable." (Balaev, 2008, p. 161). The book impacted Anna long after the class discussion because she used it later to create a dialogue about race with her parents. She stated:

> I tried to give the book to my parents to read, but they kind of resisted. The book is kind of long. But, I was trying to give it to my mom and she was like, "No." I said, "Just read it." But she never did. (Interview, 3/5/15)

Recall in chapter 5, I explained how Anna, as a child, had past racial conflicts with her mother when her mother made her friend of color go home because she was afraid they would steal something. Anna used the novel as a way to create a dialogue with her mother concerning racial issues. Her experience reading the novel enhanced her understanding of racism and she felt that if her mother read the book, her mother too would find it useful in increasing her racial comprehension. Although her attempt failed, Anna was impacted by the novel enough to compel her to use it to at least try to promote dialogue with her family.

Perhaps the most crucial usage of the novel in the AVID/IB classroom was that it enabled Mr. Turner to open a space for students to contemplate how much racial progress the U.S. has achieved since the novel was published in 1940. After the class reading of the novel, Mr. Turner set up an online discussion where students responded to this question: "What would Richard Wright say about the progress (or lack thereof) we have made as a society since the publication of *Native Son*?"[31] (Field notes, 2/13/15). For homework due the next day, students were instructed to respond with their opinion through a discussion thread created on the website "Schoology." The various answers given to the question demonstrated the racial knowledge that students exhibited. Here are a few responses students gave:

> Alexis (black, female student): I strongly believe that Richard Wright would be angered. I think he'd be angry that not only has racism not changed, but has also been swept under a rug. Racism isn't always brought up or as public anymore. There are still many people that believe that the term racism is fictional. There has

[31] This question was also the impetus for the conflict between Nick and Richard in chapter 4.

been a lot of passive racism and quite frankly no one is doing anything to change it. The book was amazing, and it opened my eyes to new understandings of the words in the book, but I also feel like not everyone would be able to read the book and be able to really analyze the story as much as we have. Which as a result, the reader will just take the book as just another book and not the strong statement it portrays.

Kevin (white, male student): I believe that Richard Wright would be proud of the progress we have made. It is relatively significant with the many peaceful protests and various other notable activities, but Wright would be disappointed in the still apparent institutionalized racism. Many people think that racism isn't a vivid socio-economic issue anymore, but the racism pertaining to businesses, job opportunities, and various other forms of social development are the more obscured and difficult to spot. Much of what happens in these grounds are "behind the scenes" and often it's difficult to determine the direct correlation between many of the suppliers and the consumers. Many of the Black communities that have been institutionalized into ghettos and other places of the sort are falling victim to socio-economic institutionalized racism. The hardest things for many people to grasp are the things that aren't always the most apparent.

Richard (black, male student): He [Richard Wright] would see incidents like Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and instead of treating these

> incidents as random isolated acts of violence, he would rather look at them as a cumulative struggle by African Americans to reach humanity, and a struggle by whites to deter it from them. Consequently, depriving them of their own humanity from a lack of empathy and thus perpetuating the racial divide and death.
>
> Carol (white, female student): I feel like today we have more covert racism than the kind that took place in the time period of the book. And I feel he would think that the fact that racism is more "hidden" would have been exactly what he meant to keep from happening. He wanted exposure to systematic racial issues, and that was why he wrote this book. When people can say that racism is over because we have a black president, or because MLK Jr. was a "thing," they can dismiss the idea of holding empathy for those facing real world issues. In short, Richard Wright would probably be truly exasperated by the idea that we've stepped in a direction in society where facing racial rifts is something that is seen as more of a chore. (Classroom Artifacts, 2/13/15).

These responses show the learning that occurred as a result of reading the text and relating it to contemporary racial issues. *Native Son* (1940), as a trauma novel, served to expose the reality of racial violence and the effects of this violence on communities of color. As Balaev (2008) describes, "significant lessons can be learned and passed between generations through the recital of a story about loss and suffering" (p. 159). The transmission of stories between generations also functions as a pathway for understanding the racially melancholic nation-state. The identification and restoration of the melancholic object—that is, racial violence carried out by the system of white

supremacy—allowed students to recognize racial injury to the extent that many students "awakened" to the reality of racism in America.

New Beginnings: Implications and Future Directions in Research

In this dissertation, I analyzed the challenges that arose when teaching and learning about race in the AVID/IB classroom using racial melancholia as a psycho-social framework for understanding racial trauma. Although I examined racial melancholia in conjunction with several other theories, including haunting, history, affect, emotion, whiteness, and mourning, there are directions in terms of future research where this work can be expanded. In this section, I provide suggestions for future directions for the study of racial melancholia in education.

Intersectionality

The focus of this dissertation primarily engaged racial melancholia from a distinct construction of subjectivity that involved the psycho-social structure of the nation-state. I merged this form of racial trauma with psychoanalytic renderings of racism to make claims concerning the production and transmission of racial trauma inside and outside the AVID/IB classroom. However, systems of power such as white supremacy overlap, intersect, and interlock with other formations of power. For instance, as I mentioned in chapter 1, scholars have theorized melancholia in relation to other aspects of social inequalities—gender, sexual orientation, and postcolonial studies to name a few. Therefore, we need to ask: In what ways does formations of race and the way we experience racial loss converge with other structures of power? In particular, future

research should consider the role of capitalism in connection with forms of racial trauma. For example, psychoanalytic theories of neoliberal subjectivities (Layton, 2010) can be examined through the lens of racial capitalism (Melamed, 2015) to provide a psycho-social analysis of trauma in the context of race, capitalism, and schooling. This suggestion is not to say that I have been unconcerned with intersectionality in this dissertation, but instead that we must be mindful of the notion of an evolving criticality (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) that constitutes innovative critical approaches to research in education. Unraveling the entangled web of white supremacy and capitalism can provide useful insights into ways of addressing the traumas produced by this powerful entanglement.

Beyond the Black/White Binary

The central concern of this study was the influence of racial melancholia in processes of racialization specific to whites and blacks. Although I argue that this form of melancholia was crucial to analyzing race in the AVID/IB classroom, it does not mean that this is the only way racial traumas occur. In fact, the majority of scholarship written on racial melancholia has focused on the Asian American experience (e.g. Cheng, 2001; Eng, 2000; Eng & Han, 2000). There needs to be deeper inquiries into how racial violence affects all minority groups and the specific traumas that are produced as a result of this violence. For instance, what unique traumas are produced by the systematic police violence committed against Latinos? And consequently, how might these traumas afflict adolescent Latinos in schools and classrooms? How does teaching and learning about this type of racial violence create challenges for the pedagogue? How might processes of

mourning differ for Latinos? Racial melancholia studies in education should go beyond the black/white binary in order to further explore how racial trauma may differ from black grief caused by white terrorism.

Psycho-social Studies and Psychoanalysis: More Empirical Research Needed

This dissertation used psycho-social studies and psychoanalysis to illustrate how racism is both an external and internal problem. In critical studies concerning race and education, scholars have come to rely on the external, social aspects of race when conducting empirical research in schools and classrooms. When the internal, psychic realm is considered in education research, it is typically addressed in the form of theoretical essays. Certainly these theoretical essays are important and many have been influential in my thinking and writing, but there needs to be more empirical research conducted in schools and classrooms using psycho-social or psychoanalytic frameworks for understanding the complexities of trauma in education.

Concluding Remarks: Mr. Turner's Call to Action

Over the course of the school year, Mr. Turner worked hard to teach his AVID/IB students to better understand the world around them. His pedagogical focus was to raise critical consciousness because he wanted students to recognize how and why inequities existed in society. He hoped (as did I) that when students left his classroom and entered college they would pursue avenues for engaging in social activism. The difficulty for Mr. Turner, however, was how to translate raising critical consciousness into teaching students how to take social and political actions to resist racism. Many scholars in

education would say that the act of raising one's critical consciousness can be seen as an anti-racist action in itself. For instance, Britzman's theory of difficult knowledge finds pedagogical actions to be as significant as political actions (Zembylas, 2014). But Mr. Turner wanted to push further: He wanted students to leave the classroom and seek out concrete opportunities to change the world.

As the year progressed, Mr. Turner recognized that many students began to feel a sense of hopelessness. They were learning about the horrors of white supremacy, but they felt powerless to intervene and resist. For example, Sara shared:

> When we're kind of like shedding light on all of this, it's overwhelming because there's so much. As like a single person, it's like, "What am I supposed to do?" You know, I'm white middle-upper class. Like, I don't think I have much of a voice. I'm still in high school. Like what possibly can I be doing now other than learning about it, which I think is a great first step to be aware. (Interview, 3/5/15)

As I explained earlier in this chapter, learning about racism and exposing past and present instances of racial violence brings to light emotions that can be paralyzing to the learner. As Zembylas (2014) identifies, "the challenges, though, to signify violence and loss and to explore the prospects of an action orientation for difficult knowledge raise further questions in efforts to seek a way out that is rooted in a political project for social action" (p. 393). When repeatedly encountering difficult knowledge and attempting to "work through" the racial melancholia one experiences, there needs to be a way to channel these feelings into social actions that combat racism.

With this in mind, Mr. Turner issued a call to action for students in the class toward the end of the school year. He wanted to convey to them that it is critical to remain engaged in the struggle for racial equity. With passion in his voice, he said:

> I think that if we want to, as a society, achieve racial equity, we have to go all the way back to what Richard Wright was saying at the end of *Native Son*: Empathy or violence? Understanding or violence? And in particular, understanding empathy from those who are part of the power dynamic. What are white people going to do to fix this, to change this, to break this? So certainly as you move forward, folks who are living racial realities of the oppressed [students of color] find solace and strength through action and resistance. But I would say and argue that it's even more powerful and more essential if folks who are in the power structure [white students] work to deconstruct these systems of inequality. Because I can't look at somebody who lives in a community of color and say, "Just fight harder." Or I can't look at somebody who is gay and say "Raise your voice a little bit more." I have to think about where I am positioning myself in society and say, "It's going to take *me* to change things." (Fieldnotes, 5/15/15)

Mr. Turner's call to action reverberated across the classroom. Students sat up straight in their desks, listened intently, and many vigorously nodded in agreement. They understood the intensity of the moment and the weight of his words. I trust his message has lingered in the minds of students since then and I trust students are engaged in the hard work of resisting racism wherever they are now.

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